



‘Learning across the Continuum’

Special and Mainstream Schools Working Together

‘Sharing Practice: Supporting Inclusion’

2012

An Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)

Case Study Report of Special and Mainstream School Pilot Projects

I. Introduction and Context

- I.1 The Chief Inspector's Report 2008/2010 identified the need to develop links between special and mainstream schools as an area for improvement and development. The Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion (Review) also recognised the need to facilitate 'a continuum of provision for a diversity of need' across special and mainstream school sectors. As the number of pupils with special educational needs continues to grow in mainstream schools, and is well documented in previous business cases related to the Department of Education's (DE) overarching capacity building programme¹, the case for sharing expertise across school sectors is crucial and timely.
- I.2 The Ministerial priorities of Raising Standards for All are: Closing the Performance Gap; Increasing Access and Equity; and Developing the Education Workforce'. These projects sit within the context of both the DE vision and the Ministerial priorities. The report is designed to provide case study evidence of how learners in special and mainstream schools can learn together, or from each other, drawing on the skills, knowledge and expertise of staff and resources in both sectors. It is expected that the skills, which the principals, teachers and classroom assistants involved in the pilots will develop, will be transferable to all schools through the evidence of the projects and the publication of the Guide to Collaborative Practice. (See Appendix I for list of participating schools/settings)
- I.3 The projects are unique in that it is the first time that collaborative working involving children and young people from special schools and mainstream settings is scoped to map out the key guidance and protocols, which can promote collaborative working, share expertise and help build further the capacity of mainstream schools to raise standards for children with special educational needs (SEN). This action will help to ensure the promotion of inclusion and equity of provision.
- I.4 The report was initiated by ETI, building on collaborative inspection work already undertaken with the special school sector and completed in 2006, 2007 and 2010: *'Portraits of Excellence'*, *'The Future Role of Special School'* and *'Special Schools Journeys to Inclusion'*.

¹ BC - Proposal for capacity building pilots - special educational needs and inclusion
BC - Conferences for capacity building programme for SEN

- 1.5 Twenty-four special schools accepted the ETI invite to work collaboratively on a joint curriculum project of their choosing with a neighbouring mainstream school or setting and to explore the process, benefits and shortcomings of this work. The projects were carried out over June 2011 - February 2012 and included self-evaluation reports by the participating schools.

2. The Overall Findings

- There is general agreement by all of the participants that there is much to be gained by closer and better contact between the special and mainstream sectors. (See Appendix 2 for schools' reports)
- The analysis of the outworking of the wide diversity of projects, including the schools' self-evaluation reports and the Inspectorate field work visits, reveals that, without exception, the pupils and staff in both sectors benefit positively and lastingly from the experience of learning alongside one another.
- The concept of shared learning is central to the process and the development of inclusive practice.
- Perhaps the most significant finding of this extensive case study report is that collaborative working across special and mainstream schools is a strong factor in addressing and raising standards for all learners. This report recommends that DE should ensure, and the Education and Library Boards/ Education and Skills Authority (ELBs/ESA) actively promote, a clear strategy ensuring collaborative working and shared learning across the two sectors.

3. The Key Benefits of Collaborative Work

- 3.1 The overall investment in working collaboratively to improve pupil outcomes, assure parental confidence, inform school attitude to SEN and inclusion and promote a strategic policy on shared education, suggests that the approach cannot be underestimated and may exert a strong impact on raising standards and improving social attitudes and empathies.
- 3.2 The lessons learned from the experience of the participating schools indicate the importance of a higher profile for shared learning. The special school may help to sharpen the focus on SEN and inclusive learning in mainstream schools through continued collaborative practice within the existing framework for Every School a Good School, school self-evaluation processes and Area Learning Communities.

3.3 Among the strengths to emerge from the projects are

- **Inclusive opportunities for teaching and support staff and pupils:** across all of the pilots, pupil-centred planning and focus on outcomes are core elements reflecting the range of need in the schools.
- **Shared education and resources:** improved support for more pupils with SEN through the shared use of resources and expertise with less emphasis on paperwork and bureaucracy.
- **Skill development for staff and pupils:** a more purposeful role for the staff of the special school, advising mainstream colleagues and working with pupils across both sectors.
- **Barriers to inclusion are challenged:** increased scope for further and more sustainable working through the established trust of working together.
- **Literacy and numeracy improvement gained:** through the practical activities and focus on outcomes, including accreditation.
- **Show case opportunities to the wider community:** in the majority of instances, the work of the pilots are recorded and displayed or performed to wider audiences.
- **Achievement and wellbeing:** in all instances, there was a developing maturity observed in the mainstream children's understanding of young people with SEN; for their part, the young people from the special school sector enjoyed the experiences and interactions; all of the young people improved their personal and social skills through the projects.
- **Social and educational spin offs:** in all of the projects, further links have developed and in a majority, school development plans include collaborative working as a priority.
- **Professional respect and appreciation:** the participating staff, without exception, learned from one another and about their respective areas of work and curriculum responsibilities.
- **Self-Evaluation development:** the process of self-evaluation which formed a major aspect of the projects has helped to clarify the schools' thinking on collaborative planning, monitoring and evaluation; the added impact of writing an evaluative report sharply focused the schools' consideration of what can be achieved within a given timescale and how this can be done.

3.4 Shortcomings and elements that worked less well

- **Capacity and commitment:** in a very small minority of cases, difficulties arose in the capacity and commitment of the mainstream schools to engage fully with the pilots. Timetabling and preparation time issues were the key inhibiting factors identified.
- **Identifying the children and young people:** ensuring that the choice of pupils was appropriate, particularly in terms of age spread and willingness to participate; initial social ice-breaker activities and careful discussions with the pupils proved to be useful strategies to engage the pupils.
- **Anxieties and concerns:** the necessity to consider more carefully the anxieties of pupils and parents and the wider staff emerged as an issue in two of the projects.
- **Funding and resources:** shortfalls in the resources and funding to facilitate the projects were for most participants a significant challenge; while most schools used their existing resources creatively (eg, entitlement framework funding) deploying and prioritising resources for collaborative work is clearly a major factor for future consideration.
- **Timing:** Timing of the pilots and pressures to get started within the pilot phase were immediate issues; many of the pilots are continuing over a longer period.
- **Educational concerns:** views expressed in one or two instances that the project was not 'educational' or enabling the school to meet the entitlement framework were unexpected. Here further discussion and explanation helped address these concerns.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 This report confirms the benefits of collaborative working between special and mainstream schools. The report recommends that the collaborative working process should be encouraged and developed carefully, and the possibility of establishing SEN local partnerships between special and mainstream schools should be considered by DE and the ELBs/ESA.

Participating Schools/Settings

Special School	Partner School
Ardmore Guidance Centre	Knockevin Special School
Arvalee School	South West College of Further Education
Beechlawm Special School	Laurelhill College
Belfast Hospital School	St Rose's College
Belmont House School	Greenhaw Primary School & the Nerve Centre
Castle Tower School	Carniny Primary School
Ceara School	King's Park Primary School
Cedar Lodge School	St Bernard's Primary School
Donard School	St Mary's Primary School
Erne School	Portora College
Foyle View School	Belmont Nursery School
Glenraig School	Glenraig Integrated Primary School
Glenveagh School	Bunscoil an Tseibhe Dubh
Harberton School	Taughmonagh Primary School
Jordanstown School	St James' Primary School
Kilronan School	Magherafelt Primary School
Knockavoe School	Holy Cross College
Lisanally School	St Patrick's High School
Loughshore Resource Centre	St Gerard's and Hillcroft Special Schools
Mitchell House School	Dee Street Community Centre
Newtownabbey Educational Guidance Centre	Ballyclare Secondary School
Oakwood School	Additional Submission
Rossmar Special School	Row Valley Integrated Primary School
Sperrinview School	Drumglass High School
Torbank School	Bloomfield Collegiate

Appendix 2

Schools Self-Evaluative Reports

Ardmore House and Knockevin School

Planning

The collaborative project ties in with a major strand of our school development plan and despite the commitments involved, we will continue to provide outdoor learning experiences to other schools. Initially, planning involved a number of phone calls between the partner schools, followed by visits with distribution of booklets and paperwork, including, for example, descriptions of the activities, staff training and risk management. Our activities involved taking a number of pupils from Knockevin School on an outdoor adventure activity, using Ardmore pupils, both past and present, as mentors and leaders. As you can imagine, a huge amount of preparation was needed, not only on the day itself, but to prepare the Ardmore pupils and develop their leadership skills. Additionally, the number of Ardmore staff involved placed a great strain on our resources back at school, and tied up the use of our minibus, which is needed every day. These difficulties were in no way insurmountable, but they did put a limit on how often we can plan an activity.



A difficulty in planning a joint project has been that we cannot allow for changing circumstances in the partner school. Staff and pupil absences and examinations have disrupted the activity, when Ardmore have been set to proceed. Variables such as the weather can also play a major part in determining which activity we could do, and it was difficult to be as flexible as we needed to be when working with a partner school.

In Practice

Whilst the planning, logistics and commitment required have placed a strain on Ardmore, the project in practice has been a tremendous success. Both sets of pupils have benefited tremendously from the experiences; Ardmore pupils showed maturity and developed their leadership skills. They really enjoyed the responsibility of looking out for other pupils, and their behaviour was exemplary throughout. Pupils and staff from Knockevin really enjoyed the activities and were very keen to go out every week! Feedback from the partner school was very positive and there is a desire to continue this project in the future and integrate the programme into the curriculum. At Ardmore, we have incorporated leadership skills into our outdoor curriculum and we will continue to provide outdoor experiences to other schools as part of our wider support.

Outcomes and Achievements

Our agreed **outcomes** were as follows:

Ardmore: *'Pupils develop self-esteem and leadership skills'*

Partner school: *'Pupils face new challenges and opportunities for social interaction'*

Both schools: *'Teachers develop collaborative planning skills'; 'Improved working relationships between schools, capacity building and strategic planning.'*

Success criteria were: enhanced pupil self-esteem, improving working relationships between schools and improvements in pupil behaviour.

Clearly, the project has been a success in all areas. However, a number of lessons can be learnt for the future. A longer term approach will better suit Ardmore in the future.

Overall Evaluation

This collaborative project will become part of our regular provision in the future. It has been a great success, and pupils and schools have benefited greatly. It is hoped that partner schools will also incorporate the activities into their curriculum and tie the activities into subject areas such as geography, physical education and mathematics.

Arvalee School and Resource Centre and South West College

Arvalee School and Resource Centre has had a long and successful history of collaborative work with mainstream schools, the South West College in the Omagh Learning Community and with other Special Schools in the Western Education and Library Board. These collaborative projects presently include 'All Set Dance' Programme with local primary schools and a Friendship Programme with Loreto Grammar School which have now been working for a number of years. The most exciting development recently however has seen Arvalee guiding mainstream secondary schools within Omagh Learning Community (OLC) to set up a Foundation Learning Pilot Programme based at South West College, Omagh Campus.

Planning

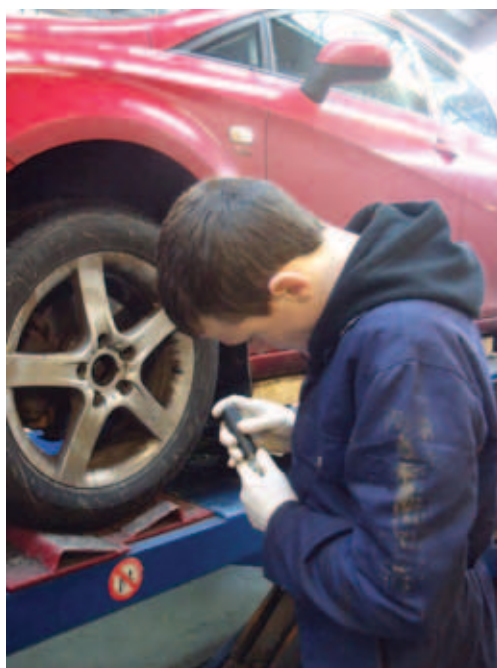
Collaborative work in previous years realised school-to-school collaboration where pupils from two secondary schools came to Arvalee to study Occupational Studies, but there were challenges in making Arvalee as a special school attractive to mainstream pupils and their parents. It was also difficult to compete with the great facilities at a newly built South West College (SWC) in Omagh and the ever increasing choices by pupils to study very specific vocational areas, such as Vehicles Studies and Beauty. The important issues lay in the need to ensure that the pupils with learning difficulties have the best support to access the appropriate learning experiences. These experiences should prepare our young people for their lives after school and impact as effective learning pathways.



Through a Special Needs Sub Group of OLC that was chaired and steered by Arvalee School, a pilot course was developed at SWC which now caters for Year 11 learners who study Essential Skills in Literacy and one unit of Occupational Studies in Vehicles Studies. This pilot course came about after data was gathered from all the schools regarding current literacy standardised scores, data regarding pupil qualification achievements and analysing Year 12 destinations for pupils with learning difficulties. After discussions regarding the data and the schools reviewing their vision of a best practice provision which meets the needs of the learner no matter what school he/she attended, the course was planned. The SENCOs in mainstream schools highlighted the learners who had particular difficulty in literacy and who would otherwise be completing GCSE English with little hope of achieving what

he/she required to be successful in the chosen field of further training, placement or employment. These learners in two of the secondary schools represented a very small number of pupils, and for that reason it is then difficult to make alternative provision within their own school with limited resources.

Planning involved a number of meetings of the sub group and meetings with SWC which took place in the last academic year. Parents of pupils in Arvalee were informed through a meeting, and as Year 11 pupils had not historically attended SWC there was the need to reassure parents of the joint pastoral commitments of Arvalee and SWC. The involvement of pupils at planning stage proved to be insightful and whilst parents had some fears they were supportive and enthusiastic. Strong links that have been developed over a number of years by Arvalee with SWC were important in the planning and many phone calls were made between all parties to finely tune the programme.



Process in Practice

There are 10 Arvalee pupils, one pupil from St John's School, Dromore and three pupils from Dean Brian Maguire College Carrickmore in the programme and all are boys. They study Essential Skills - Literacy in the morning and access Vehicles Studies in the afternoon. The attendance is very high and all pupils are reported to be doing well. The boys engage well in the literacy class knowing that commitment here is essential to accessing the more vocational area of Vehicle Studies which they all love. The behaviour of the boys at SWC has been excellent and this has carried through to school where the boys are showing great maturity recognising the fact that they have been trusted to attend college. With any issues we do have around general behaviour in school, the boys are very concerned about how Thursdays at College might be affected.

There are monitoring visits carried out by Arvalee School's Head of Curriculum, the Vice Principal and the Principal, with pupils receiving extra support through Arvalee School staff. This support takes the form of a Learning Support Assistant who helps all the pupils with their literacy challenges and the social challenges that each pupil may face. The evaluations of the pupil achievements include the tutors/staff reports, monitoring observations of classroom practice and pupil work, along with standardised results from the accredited areas. The data gathered is discussed on the Sub Committee, who, through the leadership provided by Arvalee School, are reviewing the current support for pupils with specific difficulties in the areas of literacy and numeracy. It is envisaged that achievements in these areas will support the pupils transition to Post 16 provision or employment.

Evaluation

When assessing the impact of the development it is important to look at the opinion of our pupils. Here are some of the comments about the course:

Edward says about the Essential Skills Literacy:

"I am learning a lot. I like writing and reading new words."

Ryan says about Essential Skills - Literacy:

"I feel that I am learning a lot and improving my writing, reading and communication."

David says of College generally:

"I like going to College because I do not have to wear uniform, I like the canteen and I like meeting new people."

Sean says about Vehicle Studies:

"I like working with engines and I would like to do another level of mechanical studies."

Mark says:

"I'd like to do Tiling next year and spend more days there as the College suits me better."



Prior to the final achievements of the students in their accredited areas being made available the SENCOs of the collaborating schools, the schools provided the following reports as to the success of the programme.

“The collaboration course at South West College involves three of our Year 11 and two of our Year 12 pupils who experience difficulty in English. The course has given these pupils the opportunity to begin Essential Skills Communication Level 1 combined with their choice of occupational studies course. It is suited to the pupils’ abilities, builds their self-esteem and makes learning relevant. As it is an accredited course, it rewards the achievements of pupils and allows them to progress to Level 2 when they become full time students at SWC, Omagh. The running of this course would not have been viable and we are grateful that collaboration has made it possible in our efforts to meet the needs of the pupils.”

Carmel McCrystal, SENCO, Dean Maguire College

“The Foundation Group at South West College is working very well at present. We have one pupil currently enrolled in the course. The course has been very valuable to this particular pupil in many ways. It allows him to see that there are other children who are experiencing the same difficulties that he faces on a day to day basis; it makes him feel that he is not alone. He is also developing a range of new skills which he thoroughly enjoys, such as the skills he is learning through Occupational Studies, as well as improving his social and communication skills.”

Kate McCrory, SENCO, St John’s College, Dromore

Conclusion

Arvalee School acts as the hub of the review for this provision. We are now exploring opportunities to reignite literacy support for KS3 pupils in Mainstream schools which mirrors the support that Arvalee provides for its own pupils. It is envisaged that this vocational learning support will continue for these students into Year 12 and that a new cohort of Year 11 will be able to access a similar provision. In this way Arvalee School and the schools in the OLC are aiming to ensure that the barriers to learning are removed for all pupils in the Omagh district to enable success for the pupils as they leave school.

Beechlawn School and Laurelhill College

The view from Beechlawn

Planning

The initial meeting in June gave a clear insight into what was already happening in special schools and what we were aiming towards in this project. The aims and targets gave a clear picture which encouraged teachers to come onboard. It is a pity the hoped for funding did not happen! This had initially sold the idea to both Principal and teachers! The facilitator of the project, Miss Crilly, attended the planning conference prior to undertaking the project, and found this to be most beneficial. Our initial plans and preliminary aspirations were on a grand scale. We had hoped to utilise both



the other teachers' skills in Textiles and my own in Ceramics to develop a final outcome to be exhibited as a conclusion to the project. My aim was also for us to exchange ideas and learn from each other. We quickly realised the overall time frame was too ambitious and there were obvious implications of working a budget, for example, the provision of substitute cover. All planning and funding were achieved through our local Linen Museum and our school. The partner school felt the timing was too tight at the beginning of a school year and close to an inspection. Communication and getting feedback on the planning was incredibly difficult. Nevertheless we included 12 Year 9 pupils from our school to work alongside 6 pupils from our partnering school.

An overall learning point from this collaborative work is the importance of detailed, joint action plans within the school development planning process of both schools. Building on such projects over a three year period would show value added benefits to both schools to really learn from each other.

The Process in Practice

Despite these initial tribulations, it was the general consensus that the project was a successful endeavour. Had we not had the good fortune of sourcing and accessing the Lisburn Linen Museum Educational programme, I think the project would not have worked as well. Finding a common ground put the students on equal footing and the series of workshops incorporated a range of artistic processes which were age appropriate for both groups participating and allowed for the students to integrate quickly and effectively.

As the project developed I found the students looked forward to participating each week and the mainstream teacher also saw the benefits to the mainstream students on a personal as well as educational level.

Having access to community resources solved the very real concern of not having a budget. This was a challenge from the outset, and while we are very aware of the lack of funding, I think it is unrealistic to expect certain achievements without investing in the vision. Primarily there were issues of teacher cover in the partner school to assist in the suitable timetabling of the project, coupled with a lack of support from both teaching staff and parents, as students inevitably were missing lessons. Some parents felt pupils were missing out on vital subjects and didn't give permission to take part.

Pupils would really need longer time to get to know each other more and be more open to work together. Some friendships were beginning to emerge at the end of the project but with the nature of our pupils a longer time to build up trust and acceptance would be needed next year.

We hope to continue on with this theme though the literacy link, building into a photo story of the project, and collating the completed art work from both schools to form an exhibition in the Linen Museum.

Outcomes and Achievement

Judging from this experience, with teething problems ironed out and with evidence in hand, I think we will be in a better position to put forward the benefits of continuing working together in the future in order to gain much needed support. I feel that colleagues and parents need to be fully aware of our intentions to allay any concerns. Perhaps a supporting letter from ETI/DE supporting such projects would encourage Principals to become more supportive of such activities, emphasising the way forward for special needs/area learning collaborative learning. We learned from this experience and consider joint planning, organisation and evaluations are essential to ensure success. I think the time constraints for completion of the project unfortunately impacted on the lack of commitment at the vital planning stage on Laurelhill's behalf due to the school simultaneously having an inspection. Had there been added flexibility with the schedule, I am in no doubt that there would have been a more balanced input into the planning.

I am very keen to organise another such collaborative project next year but will take more reflective time to consider the best match for collaborative planning and working.

The view from Laurelhill

Planning

- Initial problems arose with regard to timetabling and the possibility of cover teachers being required.
- Transport difficulties - school caretaker was required to leave duties in school and make two journeys to Lisburn as there were not any suitable parking facilities at the Lisburn Linen Centre.
- Concerns arose over possible disruption to GCSE Art classes, so it was decided to take students who were doing the Occupational Studies: Fashions Design Course. This meant we had fewer students to take with us to the Linen Centre thus restricting the number of “Buddies” for the mentoring system.
- More planning times between teachers of participating schools would have been beneficial. Again, timetabling restraints and other duties prevented this from happening. It would have been good to discuss, in greater detail, activities, lessons and outcomes. The requirements of the participating students had to be considered with regard to their Occupational Studies Course.

The Process

- Activities and lessons at The Lisburn Linen Centre were well suited to all types of learners.
- The Buddy System/mentoring encouraged new friendships as well as encouraging learners to assist each other and interact in a group situation. It ultimately influenced the opinions and attitudes of the students from mainstream towards the needs of the students from the Special School. Mutual respect and understanding were evident.
- Interaction between pupils from both schools was lively and positive. They obviously enjoyed their experiences.
- A sensitive, caring ethos emerged.
- Many new skills and techniques were learnt. These were of benefit to all the students. There was a sense of pride in their achievements.

Outcomes and Achievement

- All students participated with enthusiasm and created a number of small interesting pieces of art work.
- Laurelhill students felt a sense of fulfilment. They were proud of their achievements and said they really enjoyed collaborating with the Special Needs students.
- The artistic skills learnt will be beneficial for their coursework requirements.

Evaluation

- Laurelhill students are better placed to recognise the role of the special school and identify the needs of the students as individuals.
- Laurelhill students felt that the sharing and developing of creative Art skills was a positive way to encourage the skills of “working together” and developing interpersonal skills.
- Lisburn Linen Centre was an excellent venue and the staff were extremely skilful and helpful at all levels. They were most welcoming to the students, who felt at ease very quickly. I would like to commend them for all their hard work.
- I feel the Collaborative Project was an extremely worthwhile experience for Laurelhill. Not only did the pupils learn new creative skills but they also learnt much about the history of Lisburn. I felt this helped forge a sense of belonging and interest in their local heritage. I would be happy to participate again in this scheme. Timetabling and transport could perhaps be improved next time following this first experience. I really enjoyed meeting the teachers and students from Beechlawn. We all worked well together and a worthwhile experience was had by all.

Quotes

“What I enjoyed most is that we worked together.”

Shannon Yr 9

“The workshops are fantastic!”

Sarah Yr 9

“This has made me realise that I would like to work with young people.”

Courtney Yr 11

“The girls are really good to work with.”

Antoin Yr 9

“We learnt how to make paper. It was interesting.”

Damien Yr 9

“I enjoyed learning how to make the linen.....thank you for taking us.”

Christopher Yr 9

“The students are really benefiting from the buddy system. This is helping the schools integrate well.”

Miss Crilly, Beechlawn

“I think it would be great if this was an annual project.”

Joanne Ogle, classroom assistant

“The potential this project could have is immense and I look forward to learning from our mistakes and making next year’s work even better for pupils and teachers alike.”

R McCausland, Vice Principal, Beechlawn

	Content	Learning Intentions	Success Criteria
10/11/11 Week One Linen Museum tour	Museum Tour - getting to know you exercises.	Students will familiarise themselves with surroundings and each other - Mutual understanding. Learn about the history and process of creating linen.	Students from both schools have enjoyed tour and interacted with each other. Group have learned about the history of linen.
17/11/11 Week Two Paper Making Workshop	Making sheets of handmade paper using natural materials.	Working together in buddy system students will learn the process of paper making - adding flax fibres and other natural materials to create a range of paper sheets that will be used to print onto in future week.	Students will have worked together going through steps of process and producing a range of papers each.
25/11/11 Week Three Historic Tour of Lisburn	Tour around town as a recording exercise - gathering images for printing.	Group will learn about history of local area. Opportunity to take photos for printing week. Students will continue to get to know one another through buddy system.	Have learnt about local history. Have recorded images for print. Students are interacting through buddy system.
01/12/11 Week Four Natural Dyeing Workshop	Natural Dyeing of range of materials to create various effects.	Students will learn how products from kitchen cupboard can be used to dye fabric. Students will work in groups - mentoring of older pupils.	Groups will have created pieces of fabric in various colours to be used in print workshop. Groups will have worked well together.
08/12/11 Week Five Printing Workshop	Variety of printing processes and techniques.	Students will learn a range of processes and will use the paper and dyed fabric from previous workshops to print onto. Students will work in groups - mentoring of older pupils.	Will have produced a range of prints using various processes for exhibiting in museum at a later date. Groups will have worked well together.
15/12/11 Week Six Felting Workshop	Felting techniques - results in a wall hanging.	Group will learn felting techniques using coloured fleece. Will work in small groups - mentoring scheme.	Will have resulted in a number of felt pieces for a collaborative wall hanging.

Belfast Hospital School and St Rose's College

Context

Belfast Hospital School has recently started the TOPS (Time Out for Positive Steps) project. This is a scheme aimed at teenagers who have been unable to attend school because of mental health issues. The project is dependent on collaboration with mainstream schools. We work together to build the pupils' self-confidence, maintain educational continuity, improve communication skills and make positive steps for reintegration.



Many of the pupils in TOPS have experienced extreme school-based anxiety. We are exploring the use of the virtual learning environment (VLEs) and the use of video-conferencing as positive steps in the reintegration process. Pupils from TOPs and mainstream schools are able to get to know each other and work together in a virtual environment as a first step to developing common interests.

The project involved bringing a group of young people together in an online environment to complete a unit of study from OCR Employability Skills. The pupils involved in the online course included seven pupils from the TOPS project, four pupils from St Rose's College and one pupil receiving home tuition.

The Planning

- The course content was planned and built well in advance in June and July, and was ready for online delivery at the beginning of September. Sub cover was available through the OLTE programme to allow the teacher to plan and build the course.
- Ideally an initial face-to-face meeting should have taken place to give the online learners a chance to meet each other; this was not possible as pupils started the course at different times. Furthermore, we did not have access to our own ICT suite to host this face-to-face meeting. The problem was partially overcome by the online tutor meeting the learners in small groups. Moreover, a face-to-face session was held half-way through the course at the TOPS centre. Pupils from St Rose's were transported to TOPS in a taxi.
- The course was initially planned for pupils working at Level 2. Some of the pupils were working at Level 1, so future courses would need to incorporate a greater degree of differentiation.
- The success of future online collaboration would require the facility to bring the learners together face-to-face at regular intervals, so funding and adequate ICT resources would be needed to facilitate this.

The Process in Practice

- The project allowed the pupils to work with and learn from each other; online discussions and shared wikis were used to facilitate collaboration.
- The project gave all involved the opportunity to sample online learning and teaching; the teacher from St Rose's was able to use the experience for her PRSD.



- Feedback from the pupils indicated that they enjoyed learning in an online environment and they particularly enjoyed completing the online interactive activities.
- The main problem was trying to ensure that the online learners were keeping up to date with the activities and discussions; if a pupil was late in joining a discussion, the others had moved on and therefore that pupil missed out on responses from his/her peers.
- The 10-week timescale for the project was ideal.

Outcomes and Achievement

- The pupils involved were able to complete a unit of study (Unit 14 - Assessing myself for Work). These will be entered for accreditation this term.
- The pupils were able to experience an online course and collaborate with other pupils from a mainstream school.
- Staff in St Rose's and the Hospital School were trained in the use of a VLE, LNI in this case but the skills are transferable.
- Pupils involved in the course completed an online evaluation and responses indicated that the project was both worthwhile and enjoyable.
- Teachers from St Rose's and the Hospital School are currently involved in the WBALC e-learning subgroup and are discussing ways of further developing links and collaboration between the schools.

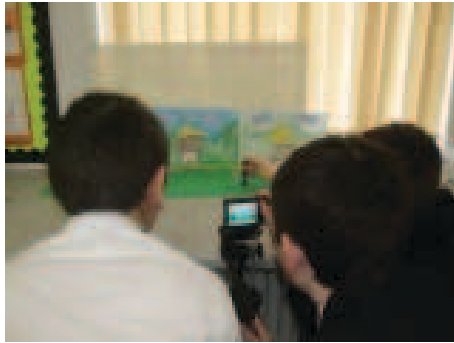
Overall Evaluation

- The online course can be re-used and shared with interested parties and is therefore cost-effective. We are arranging training for interested parties in the Special Schools' sector.
- The project highlighted the contribution that a special school can make to the mainstream sector.
- The project has shown that pupils who are absent from school through long-term illness do not need to be taught in isolation. Some of the pupils involved in the project were out of their mainstream school because of school-based anxiety. These pupils were given the opportunity to work in a non-threatening online environment. The ultimate aim for the Hospital School is to reintegrate these children into mainstream school and we believe that similar online collaborative projects may be one tool that will help us achieve this goal.

Belmont House School, Greenhaw Primary School and The Nerve Centre

Twelve teachers from Belmont and two teachers from Greenhaw Primary School took part in stop-motion animation training provided by the Nerve Centre. The training took place over four twilight sessions, two weeks in Belmont and two weeks in Greenhaw. The Nerve Centre staff provided cameras and tripods. The staff were trained to use the cameras and tripods to take still images and then to import them into the Moviemaker programme to make short animations, adding titles, credits and sound.

The joint training between schools helped to develop collaboration and to up-skill teachers.



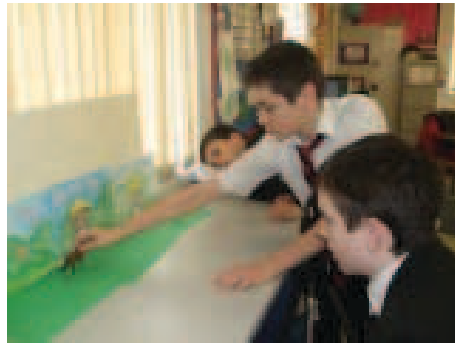
Each school planned their stop-motion animations separately with the support of Nerve Centre staff and the pupils made short stop-motion animations in their own classes. *Shared planning across schools at this stage may have enhanced the collaborative nature of the project.* Getting time out of class posed a problem and meetings between Belmont staff and the Nerve Centre always took place after school. *The lack of funding meant that we had no time to meet with Greenhaw staff at the classroom planning stage of the project.*

The children were very engaged in the project and enjoyed working together to produce short animations. The fact that the teacher was supported in the classroom by experts meant that the animations were produced in a very short amount of time.

This was really excellent as the pupils were so motivated and enthusiastic about their work. They developed valuable group work skills and had more time using digital cameras than they have probably ever experienced before. The pupils showed a good understanding of animation work and co-operated very well to produce exemplary ICT tasks that any school would be proud to include in their ICT portfolios. This work would not have been possible without the equipment, the Nerve Centre expertise and the high level of support.

Overall it would be helpful if there was sub-cover to allow teachers to work together to plan activities. Schools would require more resources and equipment to deliver this type of project in the future. Most of the collaboration was between the teachers in both schools and the Nerve Centre.

We have applied for CRED funding to further develop collaboration between ourselves and our partner school. This will allow us to plan together shared activities in both schools, with the aim of producing stop-motion animations. The funding will enable us to work with groups of children from both schools on a joint project raising awareness of and celebrating differences.



Castle Tower School and Carniny Primary School

The Planning

When the initial contact with Carniny Primary School was made, there was immediate enthusiasm for the proposed project. The Principal, Vice Principal and SENCO were prepared to work with us and support the project. The project is a result of work carried out by Mr Alick Ford whilst on Teaching Practice in Castle Tower School in 2011/2012 and a follow up research paper submitted as part of his PGCE, subsequently published in NASEN.

At a meeting in Carniny PS, an outline for the project was agreed and the challenges we were likely to face were discussed. The main challenge was finding time for the relevant people from the two schools to get together, given other commitments. The SENCO from Carniny works part time and the science teacher from Castle Tower is on a one year contract. Some creative timetabling and early morning meetings allowed us to proceed. From our point of view, sub cover days were required to allow the practical element of the project to develop, although we were able to keep this to a minimum.

Relevant staff and Governors were informed, with the leadership team receiving regular updates on progress. At this stage, parents have not been informed. The use of specific pupils in the video clips is covered by means of our existing policies and procedures. Should clips be made more widely available, parental consent will be sought. We have managed to keep costs to a minimum, using existing resources.

This project does not directly reflect the SDP as themes for development had already been established. The same is true of Carniny. As a long-term aim, joint themes will be outlined in the two SDPs.

Process in Practice

Initially, this project calls for a number of short video clips to be made. There was agreement at the initial meeting in September that Castle Tower School would create samples of up to three activities being carried out within the primary department. A Ford and D McCann agreed that class 2 would be an appropriate group and working alongside the class teacher and classroom assistants, three areas were decided upon:

- Good lining up
- Good walking
- Good writing

A Ford was released from teaching on a number of occasions to plan and video these activities. This aspect of the project was quite time consuming but, once established, it should be more straightforward.

In January 2012, the school bought a number of ipads. One of these has been dedicated to this project, allowing the videoing and editing process to be completed without the need for separate pieces of equipment, thus easing the entire process.

To date, three short video clips have been made and edited. These have been shared with the staff involved. The next stage was to create clips in Carniny. A Ford was released from teaching duties on Tuesday 24 January to oversee this process in Carniny. This proved to be particularly beneficial from a number of points of view. Having a full day allowed the process to be seen through from start to finish. The process, however, was not what had been planned. Rather, the direction taken was for staff members to model the activities. The activities were based around the broad theme of improving fine motor skills. They included:

- Use of pencils (primary 1)
- Safe use of scissors (primary 1)
- Good colouring in (primary 1)
- How to use a ruler (primary 7)

Working with K Armstrong, not only was it possible to video the activities, there was also the opportunity for her to learn how to edit the clips on the recently acquired ipad. Karen found this day to have been very helpful and enjoyable. It also showed in a very real way, how video modelling can work in practice.

The Outcomes and Achievement

This project as described is still at an early stage. The benefits for pupils in Castle Tower (primary department) and in Carniny Primary school are yet to be realised, however, I feel that there is no doubt that staff in both schools can see how this method of modelling behaviours and activities will be of significant value to those pupils in the future.

The importance of collaborative work between Carniny and Castle Tower has been recognised by those directly involved. Castle Tower already provides an outreach service to Carniny, so their staff were used to seeing Castle Tower staff in the school. The involvement of several more and different staff from Castle Tower in Carniny is not seen as anything out of the ordinary now. In terms of school to school collaboration, that is a situation we should all strive for.

However, given that the project grew out of work started during the last school year, some work on the use of video modelling has already been completed. Video clips have been made to cover aspects of the following:

- Health & Safety in Technology & Design
- Transitioning of pupils from planning room to manufacturing room
- Safe use of machinery in Technology & Design
- Sequencing procedures within variety of tasks
- Health & Safety in Science
- Safe use of equipment in Science
- Instructions for specific Science experiments
- Assessment for learning - comparison between video and activity

Self Assessment

These are being used within Castle Tower regularly and are proving to be very beneficial to individuals and groups of pupils. As well as providing models of activities and procedures, they can also be used for both teacher and peer assessment with comparisons between the modelled behaviour/task and the actual lesson. Additionally, using an “Actiview”, which consists of a live overhead camera and projector, the teacher/pupil can perform experiments which are projected straight onto a white board, creating instant “live” video modelling. This is an aspect which will be further developed.

Overall Evaluation

The work so far completed on this project has clearly shown the potential for digital video modelling as a tool for use in both primary and special schools. The enthusiasm and willingness to work together shown by the staff in both schools has been very encouraging. Without this, much less would have been accomplished. Although the idea behind the project came from a single piece of specific work in Castle Tower, the implications are far-reaching in terms of how the video modelling method can be adapted and used in many situations.

As a practice, it is not new, with much research available on its effectiveness.

Corbett & Abdullah (2005) state:

“Because they can be replayed over and over as needed without additional cost, videos have been used as a teaching tool almost since the advent of motion picture technology. The same entertainment appeal that videos hold for mainstream children applies also to autistic children-only much more so. Since children with autism respond more readily to visual clues, videos and television have a more powerful effect on them. Videos are more motivating and provide more positive reinforcement to autistic children.”

Although the vast majority of the research refers to autism, the use of video modelling is equally relevant to pupils with a variety of additional needs and none.

One teacher with the interest, skills and resources can start a process which can develop in directions unforeseen. I feel that this has been the case here. The interest has spread to our partner school, the skills required are developing and the resources we have will allow the project to go forward.

Ceara School and Kings' Park Primary School

The Aim

Our main aim from this project was to foster a link between both schools at all levels, management, teachers, pupils and parents, which would grow and develop over the long term. As with all ambitious projects we felt that it would be best to take a small step at a time.

A meeting between the Principals and Ceara Vice-Principal secured commitment from all sides to supporting the project.

The Project



Ceara Early Years teachers were keen to establish a link with an Early Years class in Kings' Park. We were delighted when one of the Primary One teachers volunteered, telling her Principal that she believed 'early years was a good age to start such a link'. We decided that a project based on play experiences would allow all pupils to participate. We planned that pupils in each school would complete work in their class which we would bring together at our meeting and share and exchange. For our first meeting we enjoyed assembly, singing and learning signs to the songs. We had break together and then pupils made a little profile page. All pupils had their photo taken to display with their profile. We concluded with a session playing together with the large parachute and allowing pupils to interact freely. The structure of this

session allowed pupils to come into a new environment and feel secure. The variety of both teacher-led and free activities allowed them to start to get to know each other. The singing session was something the Primary pupils could relate to but the signing was new, but pupils at this early age like actions to the songs, so they participated well. Making a display of the pupil profiles in school ensured we remembered the new friends we made.

The session went well because of the planning and variety. Pupils were moving from activity to activity and involved in different very practical activities. Teachers from both schools felt they had time to get to know pupils from the other school and pupils began to play together and interact, especially in the parachute games. *We parted that day enthused and excited about our next session.*



For this next session, Ceara Early Years teachers planned a morning of play activities to enable us to focus on sensory needs and development. We felt that this might be an area the mainstream teachers might not focus on as much as we are required to with our pupils; we thought they might enjoy some new experiences and gain insight into our pupils' issues and how we accommodate them. We planned again to allow the pupils the social experience of sharing break and then split the pupils into three groups to rotate around play activities, art activities and sensory story in the sensory room.

This time the pupils experienced learning different to their mainstream class, especially the sensory story in the sensory room. The pupils loved the interactive equipment and all the tactile, visual, auditory, olfactory and taste experiences that supported the story. As the children played in the activities we were able to share with staff how some of our pupils need this level of sensory input to learn and that for some of our pupils most of their learning begins with sensory exploration.

The Difficulties

The main difficulty we faced was time - time to meet together to plan activities, time to get together with minimal disruption to ongoing work in our own schools and time to get together to reflect on the sessions. We made good use of e-mail to communicate and plan and this proved effective.

We did manage to have face to face meetings a couple of times and this was where the main reflection and dissemination of outcomes was shared. Financing transport could have been difficult, but Ceara offered to provide any transport to reduce the burden on the primary school. In the event we shared the costs.

The Outcomes

The pupils had fun, interacted with each other and even made friends they look forward to seeing again. Kings Park pupils put their photos on display outside their classroom and the teacher reported that the pupils shared them with their parents and showed them their new friends.

Ceara staff were delighted with the level of socialising, communication and interaction between pupils in their classes and the Kings Park pupils. All pupils were encouraged to talk and develop skills.

Kings Park staff said they had learned a lot about bringing the senses into learning activities and Ceara Staff reported that the opportunity to compare and contrast pupils reactions, participation and learning gave a new insight into the learning process of our pupils in the context of 'normal' learning.



The Future

This is just the beginning of our project. All who have participated have learned something and barriers and fears are breaking down. We believe that through this link, learning goes beyond the classroom and will feed into our communities through the new insights of the pupils and the adults involved.

Cedar Lodge Special School and St Bernard's Primary School

Planning

Our major constraint was time as we both have heavy workloads and as there was no substitute cover available; meetings were fairly brief and held after school. This problem was met by e-mailing, texting and phoning each other but there were times when a face to face meeting would have been more beneficial.

It was very refreshing for both of us to meet and discuss the needs of the pupils in our care and to see that we both face similar problems in different settings. For a project to be effective there needs to be input from the whole or part of the school management team to provide leadership and motivation. All staff needed to be on board and to be kept informed. We found it very effective to each prioritise our needs and to pick out similar ones to address. Good planning is crucial to the success of any projects and there needs to be cover provided in order to enable this.

The Process

Our project '**Behaviour strategies for young ASD pupils**' could have been implemented in various ways. One effective way could have been joint educational visits with the pupils from both schools where we could have demonstrated effective strategies in a practical way as and when the need arose. However we could not do this due to lack of resources such as transport costs, so we relied on visits after school, where examples of good practice and ideas for resources were shared. *We were also very mindful that we were **sharing good practice** and that we were not **advisers**.*

Our project would also have been more effective had it started in the 2nd term as it was quite hard to get our own classes organised and at the same time embark on a project. Had we had a term to mull over ideas while setting up links with our partner school we would have been more ready to get started. In our case we had an inspection in the middle of the project which threw it somewhat out of kilter!

Outcomes and Achievements

There were many positive outcomes. We forged a strong links with St Bernard's which will continue even after the project ends. It has opened windows of opportunity for both schools and we have built up friendships and support networks. We respect each others expertise and appreciate the problems, difficulties and benefits that pupils gain from either type of schooling. There has been a 'domino effect' which means we are better equipped to advise parents on what is best for their children. Children benefit due to the new and improved strategies that teachers have learnt. We will work collaboratively on a Dyslexia project next year.

We constantly monitored the project through discussion with colleagues. At times we made adjustments if for example an issue arose that needed instant attention. An example was when a Year 1 child with ASD was exhibiting aggressive behaviour in St Bernard's, and the class teacher approached Cedar Lodge for advice and was offered resources to address his sensory issues.

We are coming towards the end of our project and will evaluate it by issuing a questionnaire to staff. This will be reviewed and used as the basis for the next action plan for our project on early intervention strategies for treating dyslexia in the early years.

Overall Evaluation

This project flags up the future role of special schools. It facilitated staff from the special sector to affirm their expertise and to work with colleagues in the mainstream sector. It also illustrates the need for mainstream schools to draw upon this expertise and to realise the abundance of resources and expert advice available. Teachers in special education are also alerted to the wide range of special needs that has to be addressed in any mainstream classroom. There are implications for resource sharing between schools and for providing opportunities for collaborative learning.

The greatest constraint is the management of resources - transport, personnel, equipment and time. If these were handled in a cost effective manner collaborative learning between mainstream and special schools would be much easier.

Donard Special School and St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge

Planning

In developing the project the main aims and rationale of both participating schools were to:

- Initiate collaboration between both schools.
- Enhance teacher capacity in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN.
- Develop pupils' interpersonal skills.

Teachers worked together to develop and plan a series of lessons and learning experiences based around the topic Titanic. The project was planned to offer learning experiences across all areas of the curriculum including music, drama, art, PE activities.

The group of pupils involved in the project included pupils with severe learning difficulties and pupils from St Mary's PS who have with a Statement of Educational Needs (Moderate Learning Difficulties). This **sensitive** grouping was effective as it has allowed for a sharing of knowledge and expertise in meeting the varying needs of pupils with SEN. Pupils thoroughly enjoy working together and being involved in the practical skills led and fun based approach to the topic. Good rapport is evident within the grouping and the pupils look forward to the next lesson, interacting and integrating successfully.

All parents of the pupils have supported their child's involvement in the programme.

The programme has been organised to include one lesson per month. There were difficulties and challenges in arranging lessons because of individual school timetabling commitments.

Funding for the project would have supported:

- *teacher time to plan for the project. Teachers felt that in-depth planning was vital to ensure success;*
- *opportunities to expand and enhance the topic to involve storytellers, musicians, dancers; and*
- *trips/educational visits (Parents are funding these outings at present).*

Process in Practice

Within the ongoing project teachers found that it was necessary to ensure that lessons had a key focus on practical skills based activities which would ensure that the breadth of academic ability within the group was met. This allowed all pupils to participate fully and enjoy the lessons.



Lessons were planned to make them as inclusive for all pupils as possible. The pupils have responded positively to this approach and both teachers worked closely to plan for lessons which would overcome any potential barriers. Teachers taught mixed groups of pupils throughout the project.

The experience of both teachers and working with SEN was beneficial and ensured that pace, length and focus of lessons was meaningful for all pupils.

The project remains ongoing and will not be completed until June 2012.

The Outcomes and Achievements

In planning for the project teachers completed a KWL grid with pupils. This work aimed to involve pupils in the planning of the topic and allowed the teachers to set motivating learning intentions and a framework for the project. Staff planned lessons to meet the key areas of interest to the pupils. Teacher worked to complete ongoing review and recall of learning within the joint activity days.

Pupils have interacted well with one another, asking when their 'friends' are coming back to school. The sensitive grouping was felt to be a key aspect to the success of the project.

Teachers report a sharing of experience and expertise.

Informal feedback has been given to School Leaders although we would aim to formalise this as the project develops.



Overall Evaluation

At this early stage of the project, feedback from the teachers has been encouraging. Both teachers have felt that working together has had positive impacts on their teaching and planning for pupils. Both teachers have learned from each other's teaching styles, classroom environments, response to pupils' needs and use of resources.

The experience for pupils of learning in a different school environment has been worthwhile.

Both teachers have articulated that this collaborative approach is beneficial. Teachers involved in the project aim to celebrate the work by showcasing achievement to their school through pupil led assemblies.

In extending the collaborative link with St Mary's PS and other primary schools Donard School needs to consider how collaborative approaches could involve:

- Mainstream classes
- Younger pupils
- Other teachers.

Donard School enjoys links with other local post-primary schools focussing on vocational course options at Post 16. Other links have focussed on enrichment links for PE, Art/Craft activities. This project has achieved success in planning a meaningful curriculum which can be accessed by pupils from both schools. *This project has proved challenging but a very worthwhile experience.*

Erne School and Portora Royal School, Enniskillen

Rationale for Project

- To enhance learning in the areas of music and drama for pupils.
- Staff development and capacity building for staff in both schools.
- To develop communication and social skills through music and drama.

Background

Currently there are many links between our special school and local mainstream schools. *However designing a project with pupils in special and mainstream schools learning together was a new venture.*

Following consultation with Erne staff, senior management agreed on developing a project in the area of Drama and Music. Portora Royal School, a grammar school for boys aged 11-18 is a neighbouring school and has had Specialist School status in Performing Arts. There have been previous links with Portora through the Specialist School status but this is the first time pupils have been taught a planned programme together.

Process

Consultation with Erne Staff

- Contact was made with the Principal of Portora to outline a proposal project. The Principal was very keen to get involved.
- A link person in each school was identified.
- Key staff to deliver the programme in both schools was identified.
- It was agreed that Erne School would travel to Portora and they would follow partner school planning.

Outcomes

- Close geographical location meant no financial implications for travel.
- Portora was a Specialist School in Performing Arts.
- Portora School Principal and key staff enthusiastic, open to new ideas and change.

Erne Pupils

- Very positive experience in both Drama and Music for Erne School Pupils
"I made new friends, I like everything about it." Nathan McGilley.
- Taught 6 weeks Music and 6 weeks Drama by a specialist teacher.
- Access to specialist music equipment and packages not in own school.

Portora Pupils

- Portora pupils made Erne pupils very welcome and they all interacted really well.
"It was great fun. There was loads of speaking and chatting" Naoise Byrne.
- *Increased the mainstream pupils' awareness of disability and special needs. Challenged preconceived ideas and allowed for open discussions about disability.*
- Increased the Portora pupils' awareness of the difficulties in communicating with pupils with SEN. When asked what was the hardest part of the work Kyle Hobson said *"Trying to communicate with people with disabilities."*

Teachers

Erne School/Drama

- Increased knowledge of Drama curriculum.
- Acquisition of games/activities to use back in school with own class.
- Dissemination of good ideas to other Drama staff in school.
- Increased knowledge of standards in mainstream school and how pupils learn.

Erne School/Music

- Increased knowledge of music curriculum.
- Erne teacher learning basic keyboard skills.
- Lesson being taught to Erne/Portora year 9 pupils is being taught to Erne School Year 10 pupils by Erne teacher on following day, thus building teachers capacity to sustain the developments.

Portora Staff

- Capacity building in the area of teaching pupils with SEN.
- Dissemination of strategies acquired to other staff in Portora. Incorporate differentiation strategies to allow all pupils to progress and achieve.

The programme provided opportunities for:

- *Continuing Professional Development for both schools leading to school improvement. The project also built on the legacy of specialist school status and developed existing good relationships between the schools even further.*

Issues

- Planning - due to time constraints prior planning was limited and Erne agreed to follow Portora schemes. *In practice however there were many changes made as the project progressed due to increasing awareness of the needs of the group as a whole.*
- *To enable detailed planning with staff in own and partner school there are financial implications to release staff.*
- *Project needs to be agreed prior to timetabling in June to avoid timetable disruptions.*

Sustainability

- Positive attitudes of staff in both schools and openness to change.
- Minimal financial implications.
- Close geographical location of the two schools.
- Specialist staff in Partner school.

Overall, this was a very worthwhile experience. The enthusiasm of the pupils for this project reinforces the huge benefits of such projects. The success of this innovative project was built upon the sharing of expertise and resources in the spirit of collaboration across the two schools. Hopefully the start of further collaborative projects involving pupils from both schools being taught together.

Foyle View School and Belmont Nursery School

We have recently completed Phase I of our Forest School project. All participants found the project not only enjoyable and worthwhile but one which has enhanced and supported our understanding of the concept of education beyond the classroom. For the children this project has not only fostered new friendships and awareness of differences but made learning very practical, messy, fun-filled and challenging. This is a report of our progress to date.

The Planning

We carried out the initial phase of the project over five sessions. These included one planning meeting, a visit by the children to Belmont Nursery and a return visit to Class 2 for pupils diagnosed as ASD in Foyle View School, one outside session at the Playtrail, and one evaluation meeting.



A Social Story was developed by the two schools to introduce the project to the pupils. Three children from each school took part and one member of staff from each school and a staff member from the Playtrail was sufficient. Transportation was not an issue as both schools are within walking distance of each other and the Playtrail.

The main issue the team from both schools and The Playtrail had was with planning the timing of the project. We ended up meeting and trying to work out dates for the project in the run up to Christmas when things were already hectic. We encountered a number of dates that clashed and unexpected events and as such the whole project felt rushed. We also felt that during this initial phase the children may have benefited from more 'getting to know' each other sessions simply to play and have fun.

The Process in Practice

Due to the close proximity of both schools the organisation of meetings between staff and children were easily managed. As above the only pressure we felt were concerning timing and the adverse weather conditions at that time of year. The most enjoyable aspects were watching the children form relationships and get to know each other. The children from Belmont Nursery School very quickly learned to look out for and help the children from Foyle View School without any prompting from the adults. They would hold hands while we were outside and always kept each other in sight. The children from both schools really enjoyed the outdoor adventures and saw it as a break from routine and a fun time. They learned a lot through the practical tasks such as building a nest for Spike the hedgehog. They were able to explore and experience various textures of leaves, bark and moss while collecting materials for the nest and also developed new language around the topic of hibernation and animal homes. The adults were able to develop good working relationships and to learn from each other as they became more comfortable and confident with this new venture. Just as the children began to understand that there were differences between them all and to embrace these so were the adults able to appreciate the different contexts in which they all worked thus highlighting the barriers to learning that can inhibit progress.

Overall Evaluation

As stated above we feel that the benefits for both schools in particular, learning from each other and negotiating complicated relationships, are invaluable. All who participated felt the theme selected was very appropriate using Spike the Hedgehog to introduce and lead the activities was visual and hands on, which was important at this early stage of learning. The implications for area learning were that outside learning was fun, practical and a completely new learning experience for the children which could be followed up later in both classroom either through discussion, and/or prompts using the video and photographic evidence gathered for enjoyable 're-reading experiences'. We were all in agreement that this type of learning should be continued. The main cost issue for each school was staffing and the difficulty of releasing staff from busy learning environments to facilitate the project. The facilities on site are excellent and conveniently located and we were delighted to be able to access them in a joint and mutually beneficial way.

Future Development

We have already initiated planning for two more phases of the project, one this term (spring term 2012) and one during the summer term. We will continue with the same group of children and the same format as outlined in the planning section as we all felt it was successful and the joint planning between the three participating groups was beneficial to all.

It had been our intention to actively involve parents and grandparents but on reflection we felt this would have been difficult to manage successfully especially as we were already only developing our working relationships across three sectors. It is however our intention to develop a Resource Pack for use by other schools or parent/grandparents to use on their visits to the play trail.

Glencraig Camphill Community and Glencraig Integrated Primary School

Background of Project

In May 2011 Camphill Community Glencraig (Camphill CG) as part of the Low Carbon Community Challenge installed a Biomass District Heating System. The boiler for this system is capable of using wood material which other wood chip boilers can not use.

The Camphill CG estate encompasses farmland, parkland, woodland, gardens and buildings. It is 100 acres in size on the southern shore of Belfast Lough between Bangor and Holywood. The estate has approximately 5 acres of woodland. Camphill CG supports children and adults with learning disabilities and complex needs. The children attend school at Camphill CG either boarding or day pupils. The majority of pupils in the school have severe learning difficulties and many of them have been excluded from special schools.

In June 2011 it was decided by Camphill CG to use the Forest School approach in order to help pupils from mainstream schools engage with pupils from Camphill and raise their awareness of sustainable development. Over the last 15 years Forest Schools in other parts of the UK have demonstrated success with children of all ages who visit the same local woodlands on a regular basis and have the opportunity to learn about the natural environment, how to handle risks and most importantly to use their own initiative to solve problems and co-operate with others. In this period Forest School Developments in Northern Ireland have been limited to a number of isolated projects.

Planning the Forest School Project

In June 2011 Camphill CG informed a number of local schools about the intention of setting up a Forest School Project at Glencraig. In August the school co-ordinator from Camphill CG completed the first part of the Forest School training in England. In September a meeting was arranged to present the Glencraig Forest School Project to local schools and other interested people. From this meeting the following schools expressed an interest in participating: Glencraig Integrated Primary School (Glencraig IPS), Rockport School and Loughshore Education Resource Centre. At the end of September Harberton Special School and Taughmonagh from Belfast also agreed to participate in the project.

Two P5 classes from Glencraig IPS and a class from Camphill CG agreed to participate in the project from November to December 2011. The pupils from Glencraig IPS were all between 8-9 years of age and there were 20 pupils in each class. The pupils from Camphill CG were between 10-13 years of age and there were 5 pupils in the class.

In October and November there was a number of meetings between the two teachers from Glenraig IPS and the Forest School Leader from Camphill. In these meetings the programme for the project was developed and the needs of the pupils were shared.



The following outcomes were agreed:

1. Pupils and staff from both schools would engage in a positive and constructive manner with each other.
2. Pupils would learn about the flora and fauna in the area by explorative learning in a natural environment.
3. The pupils would learn about the history and development of the local area.
4. The pupils from each school would engage with each other by playing games in a woodland setting.
5. The pupils would learn about the beneficial aspects of a woodland setting and how to promote bio-diversity.
6. The Forest School sessions would enhance the main themes in which the pupils are working in school.

The Forest School Course

The first Forest School Course at the Camphill CG took place over six weeks from 11 November to 16 December 2011. The class from Camphill CG participated in each session, the classes from Glencraig IPS alternated week about with each other. Because of the time of year there was a concern we might have to cancel some sessions because of the weather. However we were very fortunate that on every Friday the conditions were very favourable.

The sessions started off with the pupils from Glencraig IPS going on a nature walk, the first week they identified trees, the second week they went on a mini-beast safari and talked about the animals to be found in the area. On the third week they looked at the relationship between woodlands and human beings, as part of this they visited the Bio-mass boiler.

After the nature walk they had their break and were joined afterwards by the pupils from Camphill CG. The two schools would then play games together in the woodland setting.

Evaluation of Forest School Sessions

The Forest School sessions were positive experiences for all involved. Even though Glencraig IPS is adjacent to Camphill CG, it is a 10 minute walk from one school to the school building of the other. There had been very little involvement between the two schools before the Project began. This was evident in the pre-course questionnaire that the participants from both schools completed before the sessions began. At the end of the course the pupils were asked four similar questions. The pupils from Camphill CG were asked slightly different questions to the pupils from Glencraig IPS. The parents of the pupils from Glencraig IPS were also given a questionnaire at the end of the course. In the tables below the questions are outlined with some of the responses.

Questions and Responses from Pupils and Parents of Glenraig IPS

Pre-Course Questions for pupils	Response to Pre-Course Questions	Questions on completion for pupils	Response to Questions on completion	Questions for Parents	Response to Questions from Parents
<i>How many pupils responded to the questions from each group?</i>	20 from Group 1 and 20 from Group 2	<i>How many pupils responded to the questions from each group?</i>	20 from Group 1 and 20 from Group 2	<i>How many parents responded to the questions?</i>	14 from Group 1 and 15 from Group 2
<i>What do you know about the Camphill Community Glenraig?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't know anything about it. • It has a beach. • There is a farm and a lot of animals. 	<i>What have you learnt about the Camphill Community Glenraig?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learnt about Camphill. • Learnt about nature. • Learnt about people with learning disabilities. 	<i>Did your son/daughter share anything with you about the Forest School Project?</i>	All the parents who completed the questionnaire stated they had been informed by their son/daughter.
<i>Do you know anybody who lives/works or goes to school at the Camphill Community Glenraig?</i>	One of the pupils in Group 1 father works in Camphill. Two pupils mentioned someone else. They did not seem to know anyone else from Camphill.	<i>What are your views about the people from the Camphill Community Glenraig?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive views about pupils from Camphill. • Found the pupils strange in the beginning but very nice after getting to know them. 	<i>If he/she did could you list them?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the Camphill pupils. • Playing games. • Building shelter for the HaHas. • Learning about the Bio-mass boiler.
<i>What are your views about participating in the Glenraig Forest School and meeting new people?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking forward to meeting new people. • Excited. • Nervous. 	<i>What did you learn during the Forest School Sessions?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learnt about nature. • Learnt about people with learning disabilities. • Learnt new games. 	<i>What do you think were the most important experiences for your son/daughter in the Forest School Sessions?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the pupils from Camphill. • Learning in a natural environment. • Having fun outdoors.
<i>What type of activities do you think you will be involved in during the Forest School Sessions?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovering things about nature. • Making shelters, fires, nests and other activities. 	<i>What was the most important experience for you in the Forest School Sessions?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the pupils from Camphill. • Playing games. • Making houses for the HaHas. 	<i>What are your views about the Forest School Project?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleased my son/daughter could take part. • Wonderful way of learning about nature. • Hope it continues.

Note HaHas are imaginary elemental beings who sometimes live in the Glenraig Woods and other places.

The Pupils from the Camphill CG were unable to answer the questions so they were completed by a support worker.

Pre-Course Question	What do you know about the Glenraig Integrated Primary School?	What are your views about participating in the Forest School?	What type of activities do you think you will be involved in during the Forest School Sessions?
<i>Responses from Pupils</i> 4 questionnaires were completed	None of the pupils could say anything about the other school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like the forest. • Like meeting new people and making friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing games. • Singing. • Picking up and collecting sticks. • Learning about the Forest.
End of Course Question	Contact you had with pupils from Glenraig Integrated Primary School?	Activities you were involved in?	What was the most important experience for you in the Forest School Sessions?
<i>Responses from Pupils</i> 5 questionnaires were completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Played games with the other children. • The other children spoke to me. • Giving gifts to the other children. • Receiving gifts from the other children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting twigs and branches to make a shelter for the HaHas. • Playing games. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The children from the Primary school saying goodbye. • Watching the other children and joining the games.

Conclusion

The Forest School Project was a great success for all involved, pupils, parents, teachers and support workers. The pupils from Glenraig IPS came up with a number of innovative ideas in how to engage with the pupils from Camphill, including learning Makaton and inviting the Camphill pupils up to their school for a Christmas party. The pupils from Camphill benefited from interacting with pupils who do not have complex needs. The project has the potential of developing positive relationships and collaborative learning between pupils with different needs and abilities. In order for this, and other Collaborative Forest School Projects to develop, it would be necessary that competent Forest School Leaders are trained and that sites similar to the Camphill Community Glenraig are made available.

Glenveagh School and Bunscoil An Tseibhe Dubh

Background

Glenveagh School has had a long history of collaborative projects with many schools in the City of Belfast as well on the Island of Ireland and beyond. Many of these projects focused on the arts or sport so we felt it would be time to try a different collaborative project with an Irish medium school.

Rationale for the Project

Our overall aim was to bring together two schools with unique skills in the linguistic areas of Irish and Makaton sign Language. We also aimed to share these skills while at the same time introducing a new language at a later date so pupils could learn together and be supportive of one another.

It was considered that this project would give the teachers from each school the opportunity to share teaching expertise and good practice. It would also give the pupils from each school the experience of a different learning environment as they could visit the other school over a period of time.

We planned to get parents on board with work shops in both schools on the proposed project and set aside any fears the parents may have on the value of such a project.

Action Plan

The first visit to Glenveagh took place on 26 September with the pupils from the Bun Scoil attending our school assembly for International Language week. This was an informal get-together for the pupils and teachers to meet for the first time and to have time to plan for the development of the project.

It soon became clear that for this project to be a success we would have to look at long-term planning over the next 2-3 years to make it sustainable and effectively build relationships and share learning among the pupils and staff.

A second visit to Glenveagh took place in December with the pupils from the Bun Scoil coming to see our school Christmas show. This gave the pupils and the teachers the opportunity to see the creative and expressive side to our pupils in a more formal environment. The pupils also have the opportunity to socialise with our students and meet some of the parents; it went down well and all enjoyed the occasion.

We drew up a plan for the next term and agreed joint teaching sessions in both schools and the possibility of a joint parent work shop in the Spring to celebrate the work done on the project.

We also decided to record the pupils work which could be shared on DVD or on the school web site as well as photographs in both schools.

Sustainability of the Project

This is a vital component of any collaboration between schools. As this was a new and innovative project between our two schools we had to be prepared for a long-term commitment. Over time we felt we could develop the link into other learning areas.

Summary

This collaboration was a new and challenging project for both schools and the time scale set out in this project would only allow for the initial development. However, both schools are committed to continuing with this project for many years to come.

Harberton Special School and Taughmonagh Primary School

This is an Environmental project aimed at utilising the land that divides/borders Harberton and Taughmonagh as a long term learning resource to be used by all five schools on the Harberton Campus. The tree trail will be made up from approximately one hundred different tree and shrub species and will also include a fitness (keep fit) trail and a sensory trail.

Pupils from both schools will be involved in selecting and sourcing the shrubs, planting time capsules, making sculptures, monitoring bird and insect life and seasonal change. Pupils will also collaborate to produce a guide book for the trail which will include information summaries and worksheets about the variety of trees and shrubs.

Challenges

- The scale of the project, which we now realise will span three years.
- The large number of stakeholders.
- Time commitment asked of teachers and other staff.

Overcame Challenges by

- Attending The Learning Across the Continuum Course.
- Getting advice from various agencies eg BELB, Conservation Volunteers, Garden Centres, Belfast City Parks Department.
- Delegating tasks.
- Involving parents' groups.
- Some class cover - organised internally.

What Would Help?

- Sub Cover days.
- An Initial Launch Pack containing guidance and advice regarding, for example, finance.

What Worked Well?

- Great collaboration/teamwork between children making hanging baskets as an initial fund raiser. Followed business model. Great opportunity for cross curricular work.
- School councils from each school became involved.
- Teachers from each school working together.

Headaches

- Writing reports.
- Uncertainty about finance.

Outcomes

- Excellent collaboration between pupils and staff.
- Beneficial links made with external agencies, eg Farran's Construction, Conservation Volunteers.
- Parents groups from both schools have met to discuss the project and to determine the level of support each can give.
- First Phase of tree planting has been completed.

Evaluation

The framework for this three year project is secure and well grounded and will ensure that there will continue to be many shared learning opportunities. Both schools believe that the project has provided learning opportunities for developing:

- The Cross Curricular Skills eg Using ICT to create a virtual tour of the trail, Using Mathematics to calculate costs, complete data capture sheets and monitor shrub and tree growth.
- Communication to talk and write about seasonal observations.

Jordanstown School and St James' Primary School, Whiteabbey

Introduction

Background to Proposal

Learn to Sign Week is an annual, nationwide event organised by the British Deaf Association (BDA). The aims of this event are to raise awareness of British Sign Language (BSL), demonstrate its importance as a recognised language and encourage school children to learn BSL.

In Jordanstown School pupils who are deaf are taught through an approach called Total Communication which uses a full spectrum of communication modes including sign language. An active and positive involvement in Learn to Sign Week is very important to us.



The school's past experience of a successful Learn to Sign Week activity has been when a class of pupils who are deaf and a teacher have visited mainstream primary schools to present an assembly and teach some basic sign language vocabulary. This collaborative project has been designed with the intention of building on past practice and extending it to involve all of the secondary deaf pupils, several teachers and the school's Sign Language Assistant who is also deaf.

The approach to St James' PS, Whiteabbey to become the collaborative partner came about for several reasons, not least of which was the fact that a member of staff had contact with the school on a personal basis. The school dinners for Jordanstown School are cooked in the kitchen at St James', it is within a short travelling distance and we had not worked with this school before. The Principal of St James', Mr McKeague, choose to open this project to the Year 6 pupils.

Aims of Project

- To develop and maintain a wider learning partnership between Jordanstown School and St James' PS.
- That pupils from St James' Primary School will learn basic sign language and become deaf aware.
- To encourage pupils from Jordanstown School to develop a practical and effective method of encouraging others to use sign language.
- To promote two-way learning for all pupils and staff involved.

Intended Impact on Pupils

Partner school - an increased understanding of deaf awareness, increased confidence and ability to communicate with deaf people.

Host School - increased confidence and self-esteem; enhanced communication, interpersonal and employability skills.

Project information

Timescale

The project was planned to take place in the autumn term 2011 from October to December, beginning during Learn to Sign Week which ran from 4-10 October 2011. Two face-to-face elements were held in Jordanstown School on Tuesday 4 October and Tuesday 22 November. In between these dates email contact was maintained between the teaching staff. The 7-week gap between was necessary to allow for the schools' mid-term break and to allow the Year 6 pupils enough time to work through the literacy and drama activities as well as plan and lead their assembly.

Learning Intentions

- To provide an introduction to deaf awareness for hearing pupils in the mainstream partnership school.
- To teach a range of basic sign language vocabulary.
- To promote effective communication between hearing and deaf pupils and establish mutual understanding.
- To provide an opportunity for deaf learners to share knowledge and expertise.

Curriculum Areas Addressed

- PDMU
- Communication
- Citizenship
- Personal development
- Employability

Process

- Teachers from the participating schools prepared an outline plan of content for face-to-face sessions and follow-up literacy work.
- Pupils at Jordanstown School prepared resources to be used during the project - flash-cards, Learn2Sign booklet, PowerPoint on Deaf Awareness.
- Day 1 face-to-face - introductions and ice-breaker activities; Jordanstown School pupils gave Deaf Awareness training and taught alphabet and sign vocabulary on colours, family, days of the week, numbers, 5 W's and common phrases to the pupils of St James' PS.
- On returning to their own school pupils from St James' PS wrote stories and a drama on the theme of Deaf Awareness. They presented their experiences at a school assembly and created a wall display.
- Day 2 face-to-face - the focus was now on the pupils from St James' PS who presented their stories and drama to the Jordanstown audience. An inter-team quiz took place. Certificates were presented to all participants by Mrs Magee.

Outcomes

Specified Outcomes

- Common planning - partnership between schools.
- Pupils from the partner school will be able to fingerspell their name.
- Pupils from the partner school will be able to recognise and use 10 basic signs.
- Pupils from the partner school will have an awareness of how to communicate with deaf people.
- Pupils from Jordanstown School will develop strategies for teaching sign language.

Impact on pupils

Partner School - St James' PS

- Pupils involved in Learn2sign project took a school assembly and passed on their knowledge of basic sign language to staff and other pupils.
- Pupils created a wall display to pass on information.
- Pupils completed a quiz on the follow up day.
- Stories written by pupils from St James demonstrate a high level of learning.
- Drama written and performed by pupils from St James demonstrates a high level of learning.
- Pupils were able to communicate with deaf students throughout the Learn2sign project.

The evaluations show an increased confidence, an understanding of Deaf Awareness, and a basic ability to communicate with deaf people.

Host school - Jordanstown School

- Pupils involved in teaching sign language prepared all of the necessary resources.
- Pupils discussed teaching methods.
- Pupils taught basic finger spelling to the pupils from the partner school.
- Pupils were able to interact with St James' pupils and discuss the effect of their deafness.
- Pupils created a wall display of the face-to-face activities.

The evaluations show increased confidence and self-esteem among the pupils. There is a noticeable enhancement to communication, interpersonal and employability skills.

Evaluation

- Observations of organised activities.
- Photographic and video evidence of collaboration displayed on school notice boards and plasma screen.
- Discussions between staff involved.
- Discussions with pupils involved.
- Stories and drama produced by St James' PS clearly displayed their enthusiasm, hard work and enjoyment. The performance of the drama showed how much they had learned.
- Questionnaire for pupils and staff involved based on learning intentions stated above.
- Article in school newspaper.

The outcomes from the evaluations clearly showed that the Learn2Sign days were both enjoyable and informative for all of the pupils.

Sustainability

Partner school - St James' PS

- *Opportunities to pass on what they have learned to other pupils in their school.*
- *Continued partnership between schools - invitation to school events etc.*

Host School - Jordanstown School

- *Continued partnership between the schools - invitation to school events etc.*
- Establishes the foundations for pupils to provide deaf awareness and basic sign language to other schools and groups.

Future Development

- Funding for expenses such as transport and production of resources needs to be carefully considered.
- The face-to-face elements for this project both took place in Jordanstown School, should the second day be held in the partner school?
- Sessions to be offered to other local primary schools (one school has already made a firm request to participate) and schools involved in the Newtownabbey Learning Community.
- *Possibility of offering this to parents and local community groups as part of the Extended Schools initiative.*
- *Sessions to be offered to trainee teachers. Initial contact has been established with St Mary's University College and Queen's University.*

Conclusion

This project has been very effective and productive for both participating schools. It is a pupil-centred, interactive experience that has provided a real and measurable benefit for all of the participants. In addition to addressing curriculum areas, it has led to the development of interpersonal relationships, increased confidence and self-esteem for all the pupils involved. It is sustainable and already purely on 'word of mouth' other schools are interested in participating in Learn2Sign.

A two-hour Learn2Sign workshop has now been arranged for 35 third and fourth year trainee teachers from St Mary's University College to take place on the evening of Monday 6 February 2012. The format of the evening will be the same as that worked through with the Year 6 pupils. *However the 'teaching pupils' are currently making sure the resources to be used are more 'age appropriate'.*

Results of Questionnaires

St James Staff:

1. Rate your experience of the Learn2sign Day.

	Poor	Ok	Good	Excellent
Welcome				III
Organisation				III
Deaf Awareness				III
Appropriate resources				III
Sign language teachers				III
Healthy break				III
Opportunities to practice				III

2. What could we improve?

“Having more days like this!”

“It is hard to think of how to improve in such an excellent learning environment.”

3. Will you be able to develop any aspect of deaf awareness or sign language in other parts of the curriculum?

“Yes, poco a poco.”

PDMU

Literacy (pronouns etc)

Able to use the signing

On Learn2sign day a member of staff from St James' PS said that some of the students had difficulties communicating at times, maybe they will be able to use sign to communicate.

4. Do you feel the pupils benefitted from this learning experience?

“Yes, it gave them an insight into the needs of people with disabilities and how they overcome and lead a full life.”

“The children benefited immensely from meeting deaf people and seeing first hand the importance and fun of learning it.”

“A holistic learning experience - our pupils are being given a blessing by all the experiences, being guided by the love and dedication of so many gifted professionals - thanks for the invitation - learning with joy!”

St James' PS Pupils

29 from the 30 pupils said they had enjoyed learning to sign.

28 said they had used sign language to talk to a deaf person.

There was an almost 50/50 split as to whether learning to sign was hard - 14 said 'yes' and 16 'no'.

Overall the pupils rated the project -

Ok - 1

Good - 6

Great - 20

No reply - 3

Jordanstown School Pupils

All 9 of the pupils enjoyed the experience and all said they found teaching easy!

They enjoyed the interaction with the other pupils during the teaching and the social chit-chat over break time.

The best parts for them were -

'Getting to interact with the other pupils as they taught them'.

'Seeing them learning as you taught them'.

'The pupils asking questions'.

Overall the pupils rated the project -

Ok - 0

Good - 2

Great - 7

Specified Outcomes

Outcome	Achieved	Evidence
Common planning and partnership between schools.	Yes	E-mail and conversations between schools. Common planning of sessions Both schools having input into sessions.
Pupils will be able to fingerspell their names (partner school).	Yes	Photographic evidence. Observed on the Learn2sign day. Tested on the quiz on the follow up day high marks achieved.
Pupils will be able to recognise and use 10 basic signs (partner school)	Yes	Photographic evidence. Observed on the Learn2sign day. Tested on the quiz on the follow up day high marks achieved.
Pupils will have an awareness of how to communicate with deaf people (partner school).	Yes	Stories written by St James' PS pupils. Assembly taken in St James' PS pupils to pass on their experience and learning to other pupils. Drama written by pupils from St James' PS and performed at Jordanstown School - video evidence. Wall display in St James' PS. Pupils in St James' PS 'clapping' each other in class the deaf way.
Pupils will have developed strategies for teaching sign language (host school).	Yes	Able to use these strategies to teach visitors to school. Evidence from video of successful learning by pupils from St James. High marks achieved in quiz on follow up day evidence of learning. Stories and drama written by pupils show evidence of learning.

Kilronan Special School and Magherafelt Primary School

The Planning

Kilronan School (KS) invited Magherafelt Primary School (MPS) to join them on the project. The initial planning meeting took place in MPS and it was held during non-contact time, after the children had gone home in both schools. Due to the timing of the project, ie Term 1, it was difficult to find two days, which suited both schools to meet, as it was Christmas Show time and MPS did not always have transport available. The planning had to allow for all the usual school activities and plans were made to follow up and continue the project in Terms 2 and 3.

Both schools informed the parents about our project - schools sent our individual letters, but on reflection, it might be a good idea to compose a joint letter and send it to the parents of children from both schools. Within both schools, the teachers and classroom assistants were involved in preparing the classrooms and then the actual visits. Funding was not an issue, as the project only required resources we currently have, however some of the ideas we have shared may result in us creating a 'wish list' of resources.

Process in Practice

The enthusiasm of the staff in both schools was a great foundation for the project. The two play sessions actually went very well and to be honest went better than we had both expected. Due to the individual needs of some of the children in KS, we were anxious about how they would cope in a busy classroom of 23 children. Both schools were absolutely delighted to see all the children mix so well and just get 'stuck in' with the play. Due to the age and individual needs of the children we needed to focus on the children getting to know each other, become familiar with the different surroundings and also guide us slightly as to how the project would move forward and be something that could be sustained and of value to everyone involved.

It has been lovely experience for the staff in both schools. We have been able to witness enjoyment, interest and learning in both schools. The children from KS loved playing on the large apparatus in the PE hall and they had such fun playing in the home corner and with tabletop construction and cars. The children interacted with each other and we feel that with time, they will continue to develop their communication



and literacy skills and build up friendships and understanding. Some of the pupils from MPS were very interested in one little girl from KS. The little girl is non verbal and isn't mobile, but it was wonderful to see some of the girls come and sit beside her and hold her hand to say 'hello'. This was a lovely moment to see the little girls all sitting together looking at books and just being together on the story mat in MPS.

We would both agree that we need many more opportunities to meet and develop the project. A term was just not long enough. The first term was good for 'getting to know you', but it needs to be longer and we are going to develop this until June.

Outcomes and Achievements

To date, some of the aims of the project have been realised and the staff in KS are so pleased with how well our children coped with such change to their routine and environment. As stated above, we are going to continue the project, as we have so many more things we want to try and develop. Parents in both schools seem very pleased and interested in the project and the pupils from MPS have been full of enthusiasm.

Lots of photos were taken to record our visits and each teacher wrote up the visits from their own school and pupil perspective. These will be discussed at different times to inform further developments. The Principals of both schools were updated and have supported the project throughout.

Overall Evaluation

So far, so good! We both feel we have many more learning opportunities to explore and develop. It just takes time to meet, plan and evaluate on an ongoing basis. KS and MPS now have a good link, which we will use to improve literacy in both our schools.

We both feel that we have only started out on this collaborative project and would love to be able to report back in much more detail in the 3rd term. *We feel this is something that is only really beginning for us and will only be too happy to share our experiences in the not too distant future.*

KS Pupils Visit MPS

For the pupils from KS, this was their first experience of such play.

They lined up, waited, took turns and communicated with their peers from MPS. The pupils from MPS made everyone feel very welcome.

The KS staff were so surprised and impressed to see our pupils walking along the benches without any support! This made the KS staff think about how much support is provided at all times ... is it always a good thing?

MPS pupils join KS pupils and the boys get stuck in to do some building.

The MPS pupils just loved the chocolate scented dough at KS.

A KS pupil makes friends with the MPS teacher.

What fun they had in the Animal Hospital at Kilronan. Lots of writing of prescriptions, making animals better, taking messages on the phone etc. What a busy place.

MPS pupils loved making all the animals better.

Looks like one of the KS Animal Hospital Nurses has had to sit on the sick horse so the MPS vets can do their job. Meanwhile the other Animal Hospital Nurse from KS has to take some notes about the horse.



Knockavoe School, Strabane and Holy Cross College, Strabane

The Planning

The main elements which worked:

- Discussed project with Principal and two senior teachers from link school to assess viability of project and agree target group.
- Spoke to both groups of pupils and conducted Q&A sessions to allay fears/ misconceptions.
- Social settings created to “break the ice” over tea & buns in both schools.
- Pupils of similar age range...they all **wanted** to take part.
- Location of schools-our link school was perfect choice due to its location.

The Challenges Faced

- Time to arrange meetings due to timetable constraints in both schools.
- Better to run project over full academic year to ensure it is fully developed.
- Commitment from teachers in both schools.
- Mainstream school needed to “fit” project into their academic schedule.

The Process in Practice

- Pupils from both schools enjoyed their time together in each other's schools;
- time keeping was difficult at times - both schools;
- increased social skills and positive interactions were two of the most enjoyable aspects for pupils and staff; and



- project would need to be carried out over a full year.

The Outcomes and Achievement:

- project is currently ongoing and on target;
- pupils from both schools enjoyed working together;
- relationships have been formed and a bond is growing between schools-HCC pupils want to get involved with fundraising for us;
- profile of our school has been raised significantly in community;
- final joint art work pieces will be on show in both school foyers;
- animation film is being produced; and
- observation, discussions and photographic evidence show development of project.

Overall Evaluation

- A great way forward for the special school and for mainstream schools to work together successfully.
- Implications for area learning & special needs collaborative learning-funding/staffing.
- Cost effective resource impacts: sharing of facilities/resources/staff.
- We intend to showcase project within our school to parents and staff of both groups of pupils and other guests.
- Pupils have really enjoyed the project so far and working together - breaking down barriers.



Lisanally Special School, Armagh and St Patrick's High School, Keady

During an AALC meeting Ms Flynn (Principal, Lisanally Special School) asked our partner schools about opportunities to extend the involvement of Lisanally Special School within the AALC. Mrs McGuckian (Principal, St Patrick's High School, Keady) showed a keen interest in developing links with Lisanally. At the end of August both Principals discussed a wide range of ideas so that a sustainable project could be developed and commence as soon as possible in the new academic year. This is the first time both schools have worked collaboratively.

Initial Planning

Following on from these discussions Mrs Scowcroft (Vice Principal, Lisanally Special School) was identified as the co-ordinator who would oversee the collaboration. A class grouping was identified in each school and a term long art project was arranged as a starting point. Initially a group of KS4 pupils from Lisanally attended St Patrick's High School for an hour's duration on a weekly basis to work on a range



of art activities. The group identified as 'Peer Mentors' in St Patrick's were undertaking an accredited course in Health and Social Care. In addition to the curricular activities undertaken, pupils and staff from both schools shared a joint break together. *The social element of the collaboration was identified from the outset by the staff of both schools as a crucial element of the sessions.*

Who was Involved in Planning

Since this was an inaugural collaborative project, it was important that the Principals, the co-ordinator, the class teachers and any staff involved from either school should be involved in planning in the initial stages. *While pupils were not engaged directly in the planning stages, Lisanally pupils were prepared for the transition to the other school and St Patrick's pupils were given a disability awareness raising talk by their teacher.* Parents were not directly involved at the planning stage except to give their permission for their sons/daughters to be involved. *Planning reflected the School Development Planning of both*

schools. Since the development of links within the AALC was included within the SDPs of both school, this collaborative project enabled both schools to work towards any targets set. It was recognised that while the core content of any action plans set would have common aims, each school also had aims specific to their own school setting in order to best meet the needs of the pupils involved.

The Challenges Faced

- *On reflection, it would have been better for both schools to have met and planned together earlier, either in June, or as soon as timetabling was completed.*
- *However the practicality of bringing all of these people together was a challenge.*
- *Funding to employ sub cover for these meetings would have helped.*
- *Transport costs were incurred by Lisanally.*
- *Costs of materials were shared by both schools.*

The Process

The project itself has been amazing.

What Worked Well

- *Leadership of both Principals in embarking upon and remaining committed to the project.*
- *In Lisanally, the identification and leadership of the Co-ordinator.*
- *Good communication between both schools.*
- *Genuine commitment to the project: the Lisanally group were met at the door of St Patrick's and welcomed to the school. Everyone we met knew why we were there. A really warm reception and acceptance was tangible from our first visit. It encouraged everyone to feel very relaxed.*
- *Well staffed by both schools.*
- *Location: large airy room with access to toilets close by.*
- *2:1 or 1:1 ratio of Peer Mentors to our young people.*
- *Communal break: the social aspect was fundamental to true disability awareness raising.*

- *Practical subject taught with lots of visual support - photos, models, resources - so that our pupils were fully engaged and had an end product.*
- *Careful planning and preparation in both schools for the sessions.*
- *Timing - sessions lasted one hour.*

Issues

Not all staff involved had met prior to the initial visit to discuss/troubleshoot any issues/concerns.

Enjoyable Aspects

- Everything!!
- The welcome received by staff and pupils each week - greeted so warmly.
- Pupils engaged with Peer Mentors: worked together, shared ideas, jokes, fun.
- Lisanally pupils produced stunning art work on a par with mainstream pupils.
- Pupil satisfaction of their pieces of work - pride and joy!
- Opportunity to work with an extensive range of art materials, eg, clay with the added bonus of specialist teaching.
- Teachers shared expertise.
- Created chances for the development of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities in both sets of pupils through managing information, problem solving, creativity etc.
- Both groups of pupils were learning by doing - very visual and tactile.
- Communal break - efforts were made in terms of communication, engagement in conversations and a shared sense of respect and fun.
- Lisanally pupils helped Peer Mentors to tidy up materials. They quickly learned to tolerate the guidance given by Peer Mentors. This further enhanced functional life skills for our pupils.

The Outcomes and Achievements

In summary this project was hugely successful. Our aims were realised beyond our expectations. There have been numerous spin offs from this project. The same group of Lisanally pupils are now involved in a science project and hope to participate in an ICT project by the end of this academic year. Pupils from St Patrick's have also come to Lisanally for work experience. Additionally, two groups of St Patrick's pupils undertaking an accredited course in Health and Social Care have come to work alongside our secondary aged pupils during structured PDMU activities.

The project was evaluated on a weekly ad hoc basis by class staff; activities were discussed and altered accordingly. Pupils from Lisanally also continued working on art activities upon return to our own school and proudly made decorations from dough at Christmas time for the pupils at St Patrick's Keady.

Overall Evaluation

This project allowed learners in two very different schools to come together to work and learn with and from each other.

Such projects are the way forward not only for our learners but for society as a whole.

More collaboration in all curricular areas between mainstream and special schools would be beneficial to everyone involved.

There were huge implications in terms of time, funding and planning:

Time: Timetables in partner schools-times/subject areas, travel time between the two schools.

Funding: For transport, materials, staffing.

Planning: Time for planning, sub cover for staff involved.

Loughshore Educational Resource Centre, St Gerard's Resource Centre and Hillcroft School

Aims

- To bring young people from differing backgrounds and educational needs together in a new environment to experience the new activity of fishing.
- To encourage cross-sectoral collaboration, share good practice and identify real or perceived barriers to collaboration.
- To gain basic accreditation in angling.

Duration: 3 x 2 hour sessions - not including travelling or preparation time

Location: Woodford Fly Fishery, Carrickfergus

Positives:

Preparation

- Having proper equipment.
- Having qualified experienced staff/instructors to teach properly.
- Risk assessment of venue with appropriate safety devices available.
- Good liaison with other participating schools.
- Rules of club adhered to and respect for members.

Selection

- Left to individual schools after aims agreed by participating schools.
- Sensitivity to each others issues or problems.
- Those young people expressing an interest and prepared to try a new activity.



Activities

- Instruction in fly fishing.
- Regards to health and safety - proper clothing and equipment.
- Varied programme - fly tying, casting, insect identification, eating/sharing together.

Fun and Achievement

- Extremely important as it motivates our young people and therefore they like to persevere with the activity.
- Encouragement from instructors and club members makes young people feel worthy and confident.
- Can lead to taking up a sport.
- Can calm down/settle those young people with ADHD.
- Healthy, out of doors and working as a group.
- Can be used for Duke of Edinburgh award accreditation.
- Making new friends and opportunity for young people to excel.
- Can lead to future activities between schools.

Mitchell House School and Dee Street Community Centre

Background

Our initial plan was ambitious - to work with a post-primary school within our Area Learning Community to design, manufacture and sell window boxes. Unfortunately, due to timetable issues, this project was unable to proceed but we are hoping to be able to start in September 2012.

The project we are presently working on is with Dee Street Community Centre in East Belfast. We are keen to foster links with our community and a number of the pupils attend the Community Centre. A group of Key Stage 4 pupils are working with the Design and Technology teacher to manufacture a garden seat for use within the Centre.

The Planning

Having decided on the manufacture of a garden seat, the pupils set about researching a suitable design. As the pupils and community centre staff had visited both school and the Centre there were no issues. When a full size cardboard model was made, we invited people from Dee Street Community Centre to view the model and update them on progress.

We have been fortunate to have had few difficulties to date. The Community Centre has funded the project by purchasing materials for the seat although this process was complicated due to the nature of how a community centre applies for funding from a city council. The Community Centre is very committed to the project and has enquired if another one could be made for another centre in the area!



The initial planned project was included in the school development plan. The issue for us working with other post-primary schools within our ALC is timetabling and transport issues. Due to constraints on timetables it was not possible to work with

another school. Schools within the area are very willing to consider the project for September 2012 but agreeing a time is the issue. As schools are trying to meet the demands of the Entitlement Framework and are aiming to work within a shared timetable, an afternoon for this project is proving difficult!

The Process in Practice

Involving the pupils from the very start of this project has worked well. They considered what would be a suitable project from a list of six possibilities and this has enabled them to take ownership of the process. The pupils involved are benefiting as they can now see their design becoming a reality. Each has a physical disability as well as an associated learning difficulty so the practical nature is ideal. They really enjoyed the research, planning and outings to garden centres before designing the seat. Timing has been delayed due to the slow process of the funding being approved so it is hoped that the seat will be presented to the Centre by March 2012.

The Outcomes and Achievement

As already mentioned, the pupils have benefited greatly. They have had the opportunity to design and manufacture a seat, communicate with a range of people who use the community centre as well as manage their time to ensure a deadline will be met. Closer links have been made with the Community Centre and staff are working with us to develop a programme suitable for pupils to attend a community centre close to school. The seat will be used by a range of people at the Centre. A plate will be attached to the seat to inform people it was manufactured by Mitchell House School which will raise our school profile. I have contacted several post-primary schools within the area to consider our window box design and manufacture idea for September 2012 as part of a mini enterprise project which could run with ideally more than one local school and am hopeful this will happen. They have expressed interest, timetabling being the issue at present.

Overall Evaluation

This project has been invaluable for our pupils. They have had many opportunities to develop skills - co-operation, communication, cross curricular skills to name a few.

We have established links with a local nursery and primary school but I felt that the post-primary pupils would greatly benefit from a project where pupils can work together collaboratively to help break down barriers. Transport for us is not an issue as we are fortunate to have the use of school transport and also our own minibus but I know this is an issue for mainstream schools as well as timetabling constraints with the post-primary sector.

I am hopeful we will be able to continue with at least one project.

Newtownabbey Educational Guidance Centre and Ballyclare Secondary School

- The target group of pupils was identified and we discussed the purpose of the project and expectations of both the NEGC group and the group from Ballyclare Secondary School. This gave the pupils an opportunity to ask questions and hopefully allay any fears that they may have.
- Preparation work was done on the subject matter (road traffic studies) with the Guidance Centre group. This was to give them a knowledge base to help when they met the pupils at Ballyclare Secondary School and hopefully improve their confidence.
- Mr Beggs the lead teacher from Ballyclare Secondary School came to the Guidance Centre and met the project group so that they would know and feel at ease with him when we met at the School.
- At this stage I felt confident that the project would move forward as planned.

Issue

On the day that the Guidance Centre group were to go to Ballyclare Secondary School for the induction session two of the three pupils refused to go. I talked to them at length and they told me that the reasons they would not go were:

- pupils in Ballyclare Secondary would think that they were “retards” because they went to the Guidance Centre;
- one pupil said that if anyone looked at him “funny” then he would hit them. (He is very stressed at leaving the centre to go to the project group.)

I contacted Mr Beggs and explained the situation and we arranged to meet to look at a way of moving the project forward.

- I will select a group that does not include the pupils who do not want to participate. I will offer it to all pupils and select the ones who I feel will take part as opposed to a class group as previously tried.
- Mr Beggs will come to the Guidance Centre and we will team teach to let the pupils become used to him.
- A small group of Ballyclare Secondary pupils will come to the Guidance Centre to work together with the Guidance Centre pupils in order to develop relationships and confidence before introducing them to the Secondary School.

Because of this our time scale will be revised and we are now looking to restart the project after the mock exams at Ballyclare Secondary as Mr Beggs is involved in these.

Oakwood School

What is a Busy Day?

A Busy day is a flexible reading approach linking pictures and text with functional words. The concept arose directly from the needs of the classroom.

This interactive reading tool can be adapted to suit the needs of slow starters in the mainstream classroom; for those with reading and language difficulties and for students learning English as a second language. It teaches comprehension of the printed word in an interesting and relevant way.

This program was developed and produced in Oakwood School and remained an internal reading scheme for some time. As we developed the program further and discussed it with colleagues in other schools both 'special' and mainstream we realised the potential for all struggling readers. We have now presented the program and provided training for a number of education authorities in England, the Department of Education and a number of education authorities in the Republic of Ireland, Regional Training Unit, Middleton Centre for Autism and numerous schools across Northern Ireland, in addition the scheme has now been translated into Irish.

Rationale behind “A Busy Day” and “A Busy Year”



It is widely accepted that some children within the Autistic Spectrum are severely hampered in communication techniques due to the nature of their disability. This complex developmental disorder as defined by Wing and Gould (1979) identified three areas of impairment.

1. Social Interaction
2. Communication
3. Imagination

These three features are also known as the triad of impairments:

- Social Interaction, where the individual experiences difficulty in establishing relationships.
- Communication, where the individual experiences problems with verbal and non verbal communication.
- Imagination, where the individual has difficulty in understanding thoughts emotions and the concept of pretending.

Linked closely to the triad there are associated features such as, the need for routine, dislike of change and repetitive and ritual behaviour.

A Busy Day is based primarily on whole word sight recognition and it incorporates all the foundations of reading. However it goes further by allowing the struggling reader a means to interpret symbols in a simple but visual way.

Reading is a multifaceted process which involves many components, such as, receiving and interpreting communication, discriminating symbols, decoding graphic symbols to speech and comprehending meaning from the printed word.

This eclectic approach to communication incorporates using objects, photographs and symbols. Some people are naturally visual learners where they will learn to read a whole word much easier rather than having it broken down into syllables. This approach to reading has been influenced by understanding that certain students are strong visual learners.

A Busy Year - A Visual and Interactive Approach to Numeracy

A Busy Year is a kinaesthetic, auditory, and visual programme developed to support visual learners who find it difficult to access the mathematical curriculum through traditional methods. This teaching tool would reflect the models of Bruner, Cockcroft Piaget and Liebeck, as it would encourage the DO -TALK - RECORD model (Bruner) and also the Cockcroft model of Exposition, discussion , practical work consolidation and investigation.

A Busy Year provides a building block for early mathematical concepts each step has been carefully designed and researched to help the pupil experience a multitude of Mathematical language and concepts in an interesting and reliable way.

The programme has tried to address the most important points of mathematical concepts and language as identified by Barthorpe (1992). Barthorpe identified eight areas related to the teaching of mathematical vocabulary and these are as follows:

1. Receptive Language
2. Expressive Language
3. Word Recognition
4. Recording
5. Instructional Vocabulary
6. Informative Vocabulary
7. Transfer of Vocabulary
8. Generalisation



Barthorpe (1989, p3) defines generalisation as “*where the pupil can use the language sensibly in a variety of different contexts*”.

‘A Busy Year’ is a stepping stone that gradually allows a child to generalise their learning to a variety of contexts. The pupil will assimilate information by working through a series of easy steps and this approach requires the child to interact with the book. When it is evident that a child can transfer their knowledge and understanding the teacher can extend activities beyond ‘A Busy Year’ book.

To summarise ‘A Busy Year’ provides numerous opportunities for the visual learner to access, identify and relate to mathematical experiences, thus creating the likelihood of the child being stimulated and develop a readiness and motivation to learn. Ultimately the book is designed to help the visual learner assimilate and understand basic mathematical concepts and is geared towards a child realising the old adage “maths is all around us”.

Rossmar and Roe Valley Integrated Primary

Challenges of the Project

When initially faced with the project, as EPD teachers, we were apprehensive due to inexperience in collaborative projects. However upon meeting we had a positive and enthusiastic attitude, and knew we would be able to work together to produce a valuable project.

Time element for planning - Although time for planning was an issue, teachers worked effectively to organise a clear timetable to meet, plan and to run events. *Substitute cover for even a half day to allow the initial planning would be a great advantage.*

Resources were provided by the two schools and profit collected through the Craft Fair Project which was used to reimburse this.

The project was not reflected in the School Development Plan and in future projects it would be useful to have an agreed theme highlighted in strategic planning.

Transport for travelling to and from the two schools needed to be carefully managed, and staff were required to ensure the safety of the children. This challenge was partly overcome as the teachers were able to organise a timetable to correlate with a current bus timetable however Rossmar pupils had to walk when going to Roe Valley Integrated.

Communication - Planning was discussed weekly to ensure all supporting staff were informed so they could plan for trips to each school and have relevant resources prepared.

Accommodation - This was negotiated with a variety of other staff and all staff were flexible and accommodating.

The commitment of both teachers and the support of both principals overcame all of these challenges.

Effective Elements of the Project

Planning

Both schools focused on the arts as a medium through which to reach all pupils and allow all pupils to access the programme, given their wide range of abilities. This ensured a focus was kept on the process and the outcomes. The outcomes of the project were shared with the pupils and this allowed the pupils to self-assess and peer assess. The pupils worked towards an end product at which they could showcase their skills and talents to their friends and families.

Organisation

Organisation was crucial. Planning began in September 2011, a month prior to the official launch. This allowed staff and pupil relationships to form positively and allowed for targets and deadlines to be set. *A shared vision was created and everyone concerned was committed.*

Process and Practice

What worked well was the excellent working relationship between both teachers and their huge commitment to the project including their desire to ensure that all pupils of all abilities were educationally and socially immersed in the project.

The quality of planning which enabled teachers to work very closely, and remain focused to deliver enjoyable, practical and active activities.

The project promoted inclusion which enabled children to accept each other, work together and removed previously felt apprehensions, fears and stigmas.

Enjoyable aspects of the project included when children with and without learning difficulties worked alongside one another co-operatively during activities, creating an exhibition and selling art and craft work at two school Christmas Fairs, two sign language Christmas performances, seeing the pupils' faces when they watched the 'highlights DVD' and teachers from different settings working together.



Outcomes and Achievements

The aims of the project were realised for both pupils and staff. Collaborative work was developed through the sharing of knowledge, skills and expertise. Parental partnerships were built upon through invited public events and letters home. Although the arts were a focus of this project a cross curricular approach was implemented. Teachers developed progressive planning for this collaborative project and they made use of a variety of teaching and learning styles. Relationships and friendships were built among the children and the staff. There was a marked improvement in the pupils' ability in the arts and drama. Activities were planned so that pupils with specific difficulties were catered for and activities were designed so that they could adapt and be retained within the mainstream setting. The pupils' confidence and self-esteem noticeably improved as was evidenced in the marked development of friendships and working relationships.

Both schools are now very motivated to plan further collaborative projects.

Regular meetings allowed for careful monitoring and review of good practice. Self-evaluation of practice took place. Evidence was in a variety of forms which included photographs, video, DVD, live performances in schools, finished products and pupil evaluations.

Overall Evaluation

The way forward for special schools and mainstream schools is to collaborate more frequently, adopting a learning community model at a primary level of education which will flow from nursery age to year seven.

The incorporation of time bound projects annually would benefit school communities and resources should be provided by DE reflecting the importance of such a project.

Collaborative links within the town would have a positive effect on the local community and not just the pupils involved.

The benefits for pupils in the special school would be the positive role models of their peers in mainstream education, the raising of self-esteem and the growing confidence in working beyond the setting of the special school which would stand them in good stead both for the possibility of (re)integration into a mainstream setting and the wider curriculum experience offered at Key Stages 3 and 4.

For the pupils in mainstream the benefits included developing sympathy and empathy for all abilities, the opportunity to work and play with pupils and staff from a special school setting, to realise that children are children irrespective of location or academic ability and we can all work and play together.

A very valuable and enjoyable learning experience for all staff and pupils involved. Both teachers learned from each other and created opportunities to connect learning across the curriculum and shared that learning throughout each school environment.

Pupils from each school developed friendships and life long skills. Both teachers involved found the experience so rewarding and they intend to continue the link in the spring term with a different theme. The pupils have already expressed an interest in a future project.

Sperrinview Special School and Drumglass High School

Title - CCEA Occupational Studies Technology and Innovation

The Planning

Through the goodwill of the Principal, staff and governors of Drumglass High School, small groups of pupils from Sperrinview have been attending Drumglass to participate in technology lessons for the past four years. Following discussion during the 2010-2011 school year, it was agreed to extend this provision during the 2011-2012 year by entering Sperrinview pupils for the CCEA accreditation, "Technology and Innovation Carpentry and Joinery". With agreement from the Principal in Drumglass, planning meetings took place between the technology teacher from Drumglass and the Principal and Vice Principal from Sperrinview. It was agreed that Sperrinview pupils would try to complete the accreditation in one year. This would necessitate Sperrinview pupils attending Drumglass each Wednesday and Thursday from 09:45-11:30. The Wednesday session was to be a joint class with a Year 11 group from Drumglass who hoped to complete the accreditation in two years and the Thursday session was for Sperrinview pupils only, to allow for completion in one year. Both sessions were to be taught by the technology teacher in Drumglass and supported by a teacher or classroom assistant from Sperrinview.

The Process in Practice

Following an agreed induction in both schools, pupils from Sperrinview have been attending Drumglass twice per week since September. Pupils from both schools have integrated well and enjoy working together. The course is practical-based, with



worksheets but no formal written exam. Pupils are learning about the health and safety aspects of working with basic hand tools, the use and maintenance of hand tools, manufacture of joinery components and using basic joints. Sperrinview pupils also have an evaluation and write-up period in the Library each Wednesday after class.

Sperrinview pupils would not have access to the tools and environment of a technology class without this link. In addition to the learning which takes place, pupils are also having an opportunity to broaden their experiences through the added social element of an integrated break each Wednesday and Thursday. Sperrinview pupils join with all Drumglass pupils to have break in the canteen. They have the opportunity to sit with their peers, chat, form friendships and socialise. This has helped make the integration during class time much easier. Pupils are also having an additional opportunity to practice use of money and independent living skills at this time.

Challenges

- Finding time for staff from both schools to plan was difficult and most meetings took place after school hours.
- In future years, timetable slots would need to be agreed in term 3 to accommodate the fact that the mainstream schools tend to have less flexibility with time and staffing commitments.
- Ensuring that all stakeholders are well prepared for the link and kept well informed is always a challenge. We felt that all senior staff in both schools needed to be involved to ensure that commitment was given to the project. All staff in the host school needed to be aware of the project and of the fact that pupils from another school would be in school and participating in a programme. Pupils and staff in the participating classes in both schools needed to be fully informed as did the parents. Governors in both schools needed to be in agreement and aware of all developments. For the purposes of this project, the Principal in Sperrinview and the teacher from Drumglass HS gave a presentation at a Sperrinview Parent Workshop, to inform parents of the programme. Transition Officers from Education and Health as well as DEL Officers were also in attendance, as it was felt that it was important that they were aware of the developments.
- External support in the form of finance would greatly relieve future proposed cuts to school and EF budgets, to secure the sustainability of this and other similar programmes.
- Sperrinview made a commitment to provide transport for pupils to Drumglass for the duration of this academic year. As proposed budget cuts become a reality, this will have an impact on future development.
- As this is an accredited course taught through Collaboration, there currently is a proportion of monies available to both the home and teaching schools through the formulae funding mechanisms in the Entitlement Framework. Concerns have been raised about the withdrawal of EF funding in the future and the implications this could have on collaboration.

- Commitment is essential within both schools from Governors, staff, parents, pupils and other Principals from within the ALC, if this process is to extend to other schools.
- As curricular priorities meet the needs of the pupils and courses offered stretch and challenge all pupils with appropriate outcomes, each school's own SDP should reflect the developments, however if joint themes were also reflected, this would strengthen future developments.

The Outcomes and Achievements

- We hope that Sperrinview pupils will successfully complete their accreditation by the end of June 2012.
- Pupils' skills were enhanced and their confidence and self-esteem has improved.
- Staff in Drumglass are being upskilled in working with pupils with severe learning difficulties.



- Staff in Sperrinview are being upskilled in examination entries, moderation and the development of portfolios.
- The Principal in Sperrinview and the technology teacher in Drumglass plan to give a presentation to the next Area Learning Community (ALC) meeting regarding the project. It is hoped that other schools will feel able to offer similar opportunities to Sperrinview pupils.

Overall Evaluation

- We would hope to see additional links of a similar nature in other schools within our ALC and in other ALCs.
- We would hope to see a suite of accredited qualifications applicable for joint working across special and mainstream schools.

- Policies on community relations, equality and diversity need to be developed within schools and a move towards an overall ALC policy in this area.
- A proportion of additional funding for level 2 applied courses through EF could be utilised to effect impact on resources.
- Long-term sustainability could be affected by reduction in school and EF budgets and staffing levels.

Tor Bank School and Bloomfield Collegiate Grammar

Planning the Project

The initial planning stage involved teachers from both schools engaging in a series of exploratory meetings. Mr Ioannis Skarmoutsos (Tor Bank School) and Mrs Suzanne Frizzell (Bloomfield Collegiate) arranged a meeting at the beginning of the academic year to make decisions regarding suitable dates, group sizes, staffing, child protection issues, discipline codes, transport, content and appropriate qualifications opportunities for all students. Regular contact was kept via telephone conversations to keep channels of communication open. The project was supported wholeheartedly by the Principals of Bloomfield Collegiate and Tor Bank and they were kept fully informed of project through a series of planned meetings.

AREA 1: Performing Arts

Initial discussions were based on finding suitable days for the project to run, after which time-tabling issues were negotiated and agreed by both schools. After much discussion around lesson content and activities, it was agreed that the same lesson plan should be used for all students with differing outcomes depending on ability and level of performance. To ensure that individual achievements were recognised two different qualification pathways were available. To date, GCSE is clearly the more suitable qualification recognition route for Bloomfield Collegiate students while Performing Arts - Life and Living Skills remains the most suitable for formally recognising Tor Bank Student performance and progress.



Before the project started, Mr Skarmoutsos (ALC and School links Co-ordinator) held an awareness raising session in Bloomfield Collegiate to inform students and staff about the Young People they would be working with from Tor Bank and the range of disabilities they may encounter. Mr Skarmoutsos discussed ways to support Tor Bank students in both an academic and social context.

Transport Arrangements: Tor Bank students are transported to Bloomfield Collegiate once a week. This journey is a five mile round trip.

Funding: The main expense for this project is the diesel for the car during transport to and from Bloomfield Collegiate.

Commitment: The members of staff currently involved in this project have recognised the benefits of this programme and they remain fully committed to ensuring that all sessions are fully attended and that the programme progresses smoothly. Teachers involved also continue to use their knowledge, skills and expertise to assist and complement each other in relation to student assessment. Mrs Suzanne Frizzell (English and Drama teacher) from Bloomfield Collegiate makes constructive and supportive comments about the performance of Tor Bank students and expresses her ideas of how students can progress further. So far, all the members of staff involved, have developed a very positive relationship based on commitment and enthusiasm and their knowledge, understanding, confidence, skills and expertise continues to grow in strength.

To date this programme has run efficiently and effectively and as a result the students have completed their assessments and qualifications on time. The students from both schools are really enjoying the lessons and they have had great experiences, not only in relation to their Drama performances but also in relation to the social aspect of the project. They have built up mutual respect and empathetic understanding of each other within a collaborative framework - built on the solid foundations created from the commitment of students and staff alike.

Challenges and how were they tackled: The only challenge so far has been the timing of the Performing Arts qualification for the Tor Bank students. This was introduced in September for the first time and students have already met the course practical and evidence gathering requirements successfully. The practical and evidence gathering process has been completed much quicker than anticipated and we are currently investigating other appropriate qualifications in relation to Performance Skills and Drama that could be introduced later this term.

AREA 2: Work Experience Placements and Community Service

The names of the Bloomfield Collegiate students and the days that they would be carrying out their Community Service or work experience placements in Tor Bank School was decided and finalised by the end of September. It was agreed that the purpose of the placements would be to collate evidence which would be used towards the COPE qualifications that the students were completing.

The organisation of this programme took a lot of time and effort as it involved an increasing number of staff from Tor Bank in order to place all of the students in appropriate classes at a time that suited both Bloomfield Collegiate students and Tor Bank staff. Approximately 30 students from Bloomfield Collegiate are involved in this Tor Bank placement programme.

Transport: Students from Bloomfield Collegiate travel independently to Tor Bank using public Transport. This is difficult to co-ordinate but it is working successfully.

Commitments: Similar to the Performing Arts project, all members of staff have shown great commitment and enthusiasm. Teachers and Classroom Assistants in Tor Bank have shown adaptability and flexibility in order to have students from another school in their class, as they recognise how equally beneficial this programme is for students with Severe Learning Difficulties and for the young people from Bloomfield Collegiate.

Challenges and how they were tackled: The main challenge in relation to this project was tracking attendance for students from Bloomfield Collegiate attending Tor Bank School for Community Service. To overcome this challenge we have introduced a sign in sheet solely for the students from Bloomfield Collegiate and we also issues students with attendance cards. These cards are signed on a weekly basis by a teacher in Tor Bank School.

The programme has also created a large amount of paperwork in relation to forms - indemnity forms, Child protection forms and Staff information. In an attempt to reduce this work load we have found it beneficial to host information sessions with groups of students attending work experience rather than a series of meetings with individual students.

Outcomes

To date collaboration between Bloomfield Collegiate and Tor Bank students have been very positive and apart from the challenges mentioned above, it has proven to be a very beneficial and sustainable relationship which could be developed further.

The inclusion opportunities that the project has offered have been invaluable and it has created learning opportunities for everyone - staff and students alike. In addition, the project has facilitated the introduction of the Performing Arts Qualifications for Tor Bank students, while developing an opportunity for Bloomfield students to work towards their COPE qualifications and GCSE in Drama.

An important ingredient for keeping the project momentum at a manageable pace to date has been the commitment to weekly meetings between teachers of the two schools. This has ensured that the programme is monitored and evaluated frequently.

As an outcome of this successful model of collaboration, the confidence of both schools has grown and targets for future projects have now already been included in each of the schools' three year development plans.

Those students who perform well during either Performance Skills or during work experience placements are formally recognised in Awards Ceremonies at both schools.

The learning experience for students from both schools has been a very positive one. Students from Bloomfield Collegiate are experiencing the range of ability within the sector of Severe Learning Difficulties and also collect information that will help them with future career decisions. For students from Tor Bank School the learning experience has been one of effective inclusion and social interaction.

In relation to staff outcomes and achievements this project has also been very successful. In addition to the weekly experience of visiting both educational environments, staff from the two schools were also able to share their expertise in particular subjects. Staff also regularly discuss different educational ideas and classroom practices and they have already expressed an interest in additional collaborative projects in the future. Ideas such as collaboration for “Moneysense” and “BBC school report” projects have already been discussed and arrangements are being prepared.

Finally, a new group has been formed outside school hours as a result of this collaboration. Students from both schools now attend the Kids In Control Drama group (KIC). They are currently practicing for a play produced by KIC that will be performed in the Lyric Theatre later in the year.

In conclusion, the Bloomfield/Tor Bank Collaboration project is proving to be extremely worthwhile. Staff members from both schools feel that it would be more advantageous if both schools were part of the same Area Learning Community. This certainly would have strengthened relationships as it would have provided additional opportunities for meetings and funding for bigger projects in the future.



Special and Mainstream Schools Working Together

